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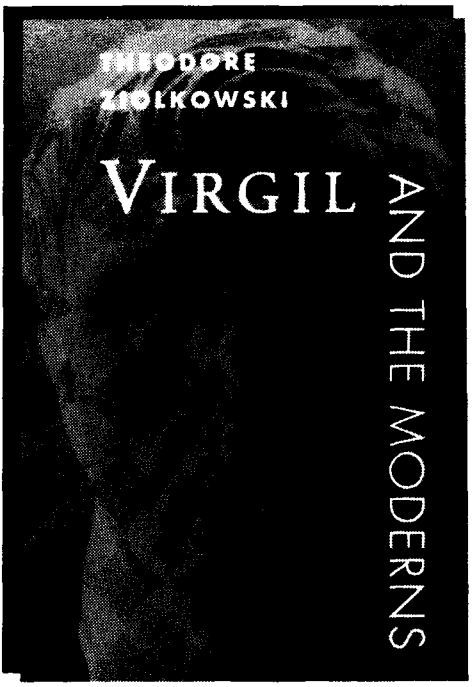

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A magazine of literature and the arts

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TO OUR READERS

New books by an Advisory Editor and a Contributing Editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW have recently been published. In accordance with our policy, they will not be reviewed in these pages, but are listed below for the interest of our readers:

HAYDEN CARRUTH: *Sitting In: Selected Writings on Jazz, Blues, and Related Topics.* University of Iowa Press. $12.95p. This is an expanded edition of his 1986 book of the same title.

BERT CARDULLO: *Film Chronicle: Critical Dispatches From a Forward Observer, 1987–1992.* Peter Lang. $49.95.

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Letter to the Editors

Dear Editors:

For some time I have been carrying around in my thoughts an essay by Dana Gioia ("Business and Poetry" in *Can Poetry Matter?*) in which he wonders why Wallace Stevens, for instance, never wrote poetry about his life at the office. And now I have read Patricia Meyer Spacks's essay in the Spring 1993 issue of *The Hudson Review* in which she asks, "Is there something in the nature of science as intellectual activity that makes workers in the field particularly hostile to the female?"

The two questions, it seems to me, are pretty much the same. The answer is to be found in a personality trait that has aggrandized itself on the opportunities afforded by modern technologies and procedures.

Wallace Stevens' business of insurance was and is a business founded on calamity, but calamity reduced to statistics, percentages, and financial processes. Poetry, on the other hand, traditionally has acknowledged our connection in complexity and mystery with one another and with the world, and it has invested this connection with loyalties and emotions. The two impulses of business in the modern corporate sense and of poetry are thus opposite to one another and exclusive of one another.

Similarly, the modern scientist in the laboratory is concerned with procedures by which one may solve for a single and more or less predictable X. To a man so involved, "a laughing woman with two bright eyes" would necessarily seem a threat, not because she is a woman, but because, as a woman, she would threaten him with involvement in sexual love, which is not a procedure that solves for a single X but, rather, plunges one into complexity and mystery that are not in the scientific sense solvable at all. Rather than posit one X that may be solved, sexual love fills the world with X's in the form of children and other results that are to be suffered, feared for, loved, and rejoiced in, but not solved. I don't think that the antipathy of these scientists is what is now called sexism, but rather a fear of connection and involvement; their passion is for neatness. If the tables were turned, and the laboratories and offices were filled predominantly with women so disposed, then a laughing man with two bright eyes would represent exactly the same sort of threat. It is, in fact, becoming pretty clear that women are as susceptible to this fear of connection as men are.

Carolyn Merchant's pages (in *The Death of Nature*) on the sexual bias in Francis Bacon's vision of science are, of course, very much to the

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point—but the point ultimately is not Bacon's sexism but his reductionism, for the masculine powers of nature can be isolated and exploited just as can the female powers. The bias of a reductionist science ultimately is not against either sex; ultimately it is against whatever is not simple. It proves its bias when it makes an innovation without regard for the consequences, and this regardlessness has long been conventional.

But such reductionism is not limited to business and science. It is now everywhere in the professions. The typical college professor, for example, no longer thinks of his or her working life as composed of services to the community, to students, to a discipline, or even to an institution; instead, he or she thinks of it as composed of "career moves." The career is an exclusive neat enclosure of the same kind as the business office and the laboratory. I have begun to think that perhaps the ideal enclosure for this kind of modern personality is the cockpit of a fighter-bomber in which one person is alone, free (temporarily) in the illusion of precise control of great power, and beyond reach (temporarily) of the consequences of his or her acts.

Sexism is not necessarily a trait of this kind of personality, but sexual love is necessarily one of its crises. As soon as sexual love is understood as an involvement in complexity and mystery, requiring commitment, mutual help, revelation of one's faults, and lifelong practice, then it is perceived as a threat. As evidence, we have only to look at the massive effort in our time to divorce sex from emotional or spiritual commitment on the one hand and from reproductivity on the other.

Some women and men now are willing to affirm sexual love as a serious, complex, and mysterious relationship, and some are not. This, it seems to me, is a division that cuts straight across the more famous divisions of our era, and is as significant as any.

Port Royal, Kentucky *Wendell Berry*

Patricia Meyer Spacks has written to the Editors that she is in full agreement with the points made by Wendell Berry in his letter.

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LOUIS SIMPSON

In Transit

In Transit

Every Friday night members of the family gathered at my grandmother's apartment in Brooklyn: my mother's younger sisters, Ruth and Annette, her niece Dorothy and brother Joe. My mother was usually absent; she was traveling, demonstrating cosmetics for Helena Rubinstein . . . at first in the States, then in Central and South America.

When I was growing up on the island of Jamaica my mother did not mention her Jewish background. She wanted to put behind her the poverty of her early years in Russia and her life as a working girl in New York, sewing tucks in shirts. She admired the English who were at the top of the social heap in Jamaica, their fine way of speaking and good manners. She learned to serve tea at four o'clock in the English fashion, and played golf at the Liguanea Club.

There were Jews in Jamaica. The first book ever published by a Jamaican, a translation of the psalms of David, was by a Portuguese Jew, Daniel Israel Lopez Laguna. In the second half of the sixteenth century when Jews were driven out of Spain and Portugal, they were glad to find a haven in the West Indies where they were not persecuted. As time went by they prospered, but they did not want to draw attention to themselves and their religion. My Presbyterian aunts, who had a little to say about everything, did not speak of Jews. They did, however, talk about Catholics. It might have been only the day before yesterday that Cromwell seized the island from the Spanish and made it a British colony. Whenever a chicken or turkey was served at the table Aunt May was sure to point out the Pope's nose.

At school I attended Anglican services in the chapel twice a

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day. I was appointed to read the lessons from the pulpit, the first boy at Munro to do so. It was an experiment—the lesson was always read by a master—and I passed with flying colors. The words and rhythms of the Old Testament as well as the New were imprinted on my mind, but I did not make a connection between people I read about in Scripture and anyone living today. I had never, of my own knowledge, seen a Jew.

I had a best friend at Munro with whom I walked up and down on the barbecue every evening talking about trains and boxing. His name was Peter Lopez. But for his Jamaican accent Peter might have been taken for an English boy. It was not until years later, reading an article about Jews in the West Indies, that I learned that Lopez was a common name among Sephardic Jews. I don't think Peter was any more aware of this than I.

When I came to New York I discovered that my mother was a Jew and therefore, according to Jewish law, so was I. My grandmother spoke English with a Yiddish accent. She was very religious. I can see her lighting the candles on Friday night, bringing her hands to her breast and praying in silence. A few years ago she had made a trip back to Russia, bringing clothing and money that she distributed, enabling some young people to marry.

But my other female relatives had lost their religion in mid-Atlantic. They had given up their Jewish traditions and become assimilated, but only on the most superficial level. Ruth was the receptionist at a beauty salon; Annette ran a theatrical agency; Dorothy worked for a stockbroker; and my mother sold cosmetics. They were happy to dine in a restaurant and go to a Broadway show—they seemed to want nothing more, unless it were some man who would marry them and provide the kind of life you saw in the movies. I don't think I ever heard them discuss a book or an article they had read. And there was no man in the family with whom I might talk about ideas that were important to me. My mother's brother Joe was a pharmacist and worked in a drugstore on Broadway, a few blocks above Times Square. Joe was a good soul but his life was circumscribed by the pills and eyebrow tweezers he sold and his life with the wife his mother had picked for him to marry.

I was a Jew according to the law, but that was all. I had nothing in common with these bland, assimilated Jews who

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cared nothing for the word. On the other hand I had nothing in common with the men I saw walking on Kingston Avenue, my grandmother's people with their beards and fish-white complexions, their black hats and overcoats, speaking a foreign tongue.

My mother was renting an apartment in Manhattan on 53rd Street, just west of Fifth Avenue, next to the Museum of Modern Art. As she was usually away on business, Ruth and Dorothy lived there too. When my mother returned from one of her trips she would take me to dinner in a restaurant and give me advice.

One piece of her advice I have never forgotten. I was about to enter college, and she told me not to let anyone know that I came from Jamaica—I was to say that I came from England. She did not give a reason but it was obvious: if I said I was Jamaican people would think I was colored. It did not seem to occur to her that this advice might make me think there was something I should be ashamed of—which it did. For years I felt uneasy about having been born in Jamaica. It did not occur to my mother that it was wrong to tell me to lie.

Fortunately all my training had been in the other direction: I grew up thinking that to lie was a sin . . . unforgivable. I did not take her advice—and it made me dislike her. I thought that in her business, cosmetics, she was continually lying about the products she sold, saying they would make women beautiful when, in fact, the face creams and "skin nourishers" were only grease. I thought she was always pretending to be something other than she was, and all her ideas were wrong.

In the early 1940s she was traveling far afield in Latin America. Her talk that had been punctuated with the word "dollars," so that I had to resist the impulse to put my hands over my ears, was now punctuated with the word "bolivars." I was happy to return to my room in the dormitory at Columbia and the reality of poems and stories.

There were two courses all Columbia College students had to take in their first year, Humanities and Contemporary Civilization. Humanities was a course in great books ranging from Homer to Kafka. Contemporary Civilization took care of everything else, a ragbag of political economy, sociology, and

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psychology. I preferred the great books and was fascinated by each in turn. One week I would be immersed in Thucydides, another in the plays of Sophocles. The course, however, did not include poetry except as an adjunct to drama. This was typical of the tastes of the faculty at Columbia. With the exception of Mark Van Doren, who was a poet, they had very little respect for poetry. What they liked was an idea that could be argued about. The teacher I had four times a week, Lionel Trilling, typified this attitude.

Trilling had considerable charm and was held in awe by his students. Not only was he a professor, he had connections downtown, publishing articles in *Partisan Review*. He was the author of a biography of Matthew Arnold and short stories that had been anthologized. I thought his classes fascinating though I was often disappointed because he did not address the aspect of a work that excited me. On his part he had no high opinion of my contributions to the class discussions. Once he asked us to name a present-day writer of comedy. I put up my hand and said "P. G. Wodehouse." "Oh Mr. Simpson," he said sadly, and gazed out the window at a tree with his luminous eyes. It would be some years before *Partisan Review* decided that Wodehouse was a major author.

At the end of the first semester Trilling gave me a middling grade. Two of my classmates went to see him and complain on my behalf—they said I was one of the best students in the class. At least, this is what a man told me long after. The story may be true though I find it hard to believe. At the end of the second semester, however, Trilling did give me an A.

The course made a great difference . . . how great I would discover when, as a teacher, I rubbed elbows with colleagues who knew nothing beyond their field, *The Faerie Queene* or the Victorian novel. And it has given me a skeptical view of contemporary authors, the kind who air their opinions on television. Can they really think they are so important? Or is it just publicity?

There is a nineteenth-century painting of Napoleon on the deck of the *Bellerophon*, being transported to exile on St. Helena. He is wearing the cocked hat he seems never to have taken off and his hands are clasped behind his back as he stares at the sea, lost in his thoughts. Some British naval officers are

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watching him covertly. This was how people looked at Trilling in the corridor of Hamilton Hall when he stepped out of his office . . . a mixture of awe and apprehension. For they were aware of his power to do harm. If he thought an instructor was not "the Columbia type" the young man would find himself looking for a job. On the other hand, if he liked you he might give you a book to review or recommend you on graduation for a job in a publishing house.

Van Doren was the opposite of Trilling. The core of his character was a love of literature. His teaching was spontaneous—he told you what came into his head, and there was a great deal in his head. Teaching such as this cannot be methodized—it depends, as T. S. Eliot said criticism must, on being very intelligent. It is in disrepute at the present time in universities for not many students are very intelligent and literature makes demands on them they cannot meet, the first being an understanding and love of poetry. It is far easier to adopt and cleave to the sayings of a Derrida, a De Man, a Stanley Fish.

> Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
> A sheep-hook, or have learnt aught else the least
> That to the faithful herdsman's art belongs!
> What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
> And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
> Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw:
> The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
> But swoln with wind and the rank mist they draw,
> Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread . . .

During the week my courses kept me busy and I had friends to talk to. My best friend was Ted Hoffman: he read my poems and gave me the encouragement I needed. But weekends, when the students went home to their families, could be lonely, and the vacations at Christmas and Easter were times of desolation. I went for long walks on Riverside Drive and took my meals in cafeterias. I would go to a movie by myself, perhaps at the nearby Thalia that showed avant-garde movies like *The Blood of a Poet* or the Stanley Theater at Times Square that featured movies from the Soviet Union.

As a schoolboy I had been taken with English poets of the

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Left, Auden, Spender, and their circle. I had written for *Public Opinion*. At Columbia I told my friends I was a socialist; in dormitory discussions I would talk authoritatively about Marx and the Soviet Union. Now the Soviet Union was at war with Germany—a colossal struggle taking place in the snow. Movies at the Stanley, where I got my information, showed Russians as a nation of freedom fighters and lovers of democracy.

I took the subway back to Columbia and my room in John Jay, twelve floors above the street. It was beginning to snow. Lights blurred and the flakes built layers on the windowsills across the way. Traffic noises were hushed. A foghorn boomed in the distance.

I picked up Yeats's *Collected Poems* and in a few minutes forgot that I had been feeling lonely and there was a war.

Riverside Drive

I have been staring at a sentence
for fifteen minutes. The mind
was not made for social science.

I take my overcoat and go.

Night has fallen on Riverside Drive . . .
the sign for Spry shining
across the Hudson: "Spry for Frying ****
for Baking."

I am thinking of Rilke
and "Who if I cried would hear me
among the angelic orders?"

It seems that we are here to say
names like "Spry" and "Riverside Drive" . . .
to carry the names of places
and things with us, into the night

glimmering with stars and constellations.

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Lessons of the Body

> He vaguely desired to walk around and around the body and stare; the impulse of the living to try to read in dead eyes the answer to the Question.
>
> —Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*

I enlisted in the army and was sent to a tank regiment at Camp Bowie in Texas. I was the loader and radio operator. I sat in the turret surrounded by shells as the tank went jolting and tilting at alarming angles. I would have preferred to be in the infantry where my fate would lie in my own hands and feet.

From Bowie the regiment moved to Fort Hood. Then I was selected for the Army Specialized Training Program and sent to the University of Louisiana at Baton Rouge to study engineering, for which I had no aptitude. The program was suddenly terminated and I was sent to the 75th Infantry Division at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. There, standing over a machine gun in the woods, with snow falling and my feet freezing, I had my wish. Years later, on the subway in New York, I saw a man named Pucci who had been in the tank with me. He told me the regiment had gone to Europe . . . the tank had been hit, the driver killed and he himself wounded.

I was taken out of the division and shipped to Northern Ireland as a replacement. And there I joined the 101st Airborne Division stationed in England. The 101st was an outfit of parachute and glider infantry you volunteered for. I don't recall volunteering, but there I was, at Reading, in the 327th Glider Infantry. Perhaps in a moment of recklessness I put up my hand. Northern Ireland was dismal . . . it rained continually . . . I may have volunteered out of desperation, hoping for something better.

The regiment was supposed to go into combat in gliders but on D-day, the sixth of June, we waded ashore on Utah Beach. We were lucky . . . by the time we landed there was no opposition on the beach itself. The battleships firing their 16-inch guns, and the P-47s and Spitfires plunging toward the ground and firing rockets and machine guns, must have taken care of any Germans in the immediate vicinity. We marched inland, passing fields and *bocages*, the hedgerows that would

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soon be notorious. They were thick and tough, each hedgerow a line of defense where the enemy could lie concealed.

The files parted and the men in front stepped around an object lying in the road. A man was lying face down. He was dressed in the steel helmet, green fatigues, pack, and paratrooper boots that we wore, and he was dead. This was fascinating—we would have liked to walk around the body and stare.

We came upon other bodies lying at the side of the road. These were German. They lay with their rifles in a litter of equipment . . . gas masks, mess kits, shovels. They wore mustard-colored camouflage and raincoats that looked like capes. It didn't take long for every man in G Company to know that we were facing parachute infantry, the best they had. Information travels fast down the line.

It was a cool, fresh day in June. Shells from the battleships lying offshore went fluttering over. A German tank was standing in the road. It had burned, and one of the crew had climbed halfway out the hatch before he was engulfed in flames. Now he was a substance, black and red, that flowed down the side of the tank. It looked like burned rubber.

The order came to fall out and we sat and rested, leaning back on our packs. The First Sergeant motioned me over . . . I was the Captain's runner, carrying his messages. I was to tell the lieutenant of the lead platoon to take the fork to the right at the next crossroads.

I went up the road at the double, passing the men spread along the banks. They called to me . . . "What's up?" I shook my head to show that I was as much in the dark as they, at the same time making a gesture with my hand to reassure them . . . it couldn't be important. I gave the lieutenant the message and made my way back to Headquarters Section.

An order was coming over the radio. We were to stay where we were and dig in. The company arranged itself among the hedgerows by platoons and squads and you were alone. When night fell you opened the K-ration. You mixed the powdered coffee with water in your mug. The K-ration box would burn. You made a fire at the bottom of your foxhole and ate the meat and the two fortified biscuits. You smoked one of the cigarettes. Then you shoved down in your sleeping bag. An hour later a

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plane came over. It circled with a throbbing sound, German, and dropped a bomb that whistled and shook the ground.

Something was moving about in the darkness to our front. There were rifle shots. When morning came dead cows lay among the hedgerows, their legs sticking up.

We resumed our advance, marching at combat interval, riflemen out in front and on the flanks. We came to an open field crossed by a railroad embankment. Machine guns were firing from the other side, bullets passing overhead. We lay in the shelter of the embankment.

Bullets were sweeping to and fro directly above us. In a few minutes the order would come to go over the embankment. We were like infantry in the Great War waiting to go over the top. I had read about trench warfare and looked at photographs . . . a line of men with helmets and rifles looking up at the camera. In a few minutes many of them would be dead. There were photographs of bodies that had lain in No Man's Land for weeks and months . . . in one case, years. A skeleton clothed in rags.

The order did not come. Two of our planes swooped over, Thunderbolts, and fired rockets at the ground we could not see, on the other side. They made several passes, firing their machine guns. Then the order came to move out, and we climbed the embankment. The guns had stopped firing, and when we came to the end of the field there was the usual litter of equipment, and the bodies of the ones who had not been lucky, flies already settling on their open eyes and mouths.

It may have been the next day that we came to a wooded strip of land with water on each side. We were walking in the usual files with a squad strung out in front when guns began firing at us. I knew the sound very well. The German machine gun fired faster than ours, and their submachine gun, the Schmeisser, positively purred. I dropped face down. Six inches above my head a wicked, white gash appeared in a tree trunk. There was an explosion . . . another. The ground trembled. The explosions walked down the strip of earth on which we were lying, footsteps of an approaching giant. I felt a blow in my back, a very light blow, on the shoulder blade. The giant walked by.

About ten feet away a voice was calling "Mamma mia!" It

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called over and over. It would stop calling for a moment, then resume.

The footsteps were coming back. Again they passed by me, showering my back with twigs and leaves. Bullets hummed and ricocheted among the trees. I reached my right arm down my side and, without raising my body from the ground, unbuttoned the flap of the entrenching tool carrier and eased out the tool. I brought it in front of me without raising my arm, and moved the blade to the open position, and screwed the collar so that it held the blade fixed, and began scraping the earth to make a depression.

The shells continued walking among us, choosing whom to kill, whom to wound, whom to pass by. They were mortar shells and made no sound as they fell through the air. I felt a trickle of blood running down my back . . . it was a blessing. "Until the next time," the giant said as he walked by. All the time I lay there the voice near me was calling "Mamma mia!" Finally it stopped.

Shells were coming over from behind us, going to the German machine gunners and mortar crews. We were no longer being fired on. We stood up and went forward again, along the strip of trees, beside the water. There were houses at the end and the beginning of a town.

There were two brothers, twins, in G Company. One was the man who lay near me calling for his mother. He died there, and his brother went through the rest of the war with an air of sad devotion. One day in Holland when the company was in the same fix, but this time it was German .88s that had us lying on our faces, shells coming straight at you like rifle bullets, flat and screaming, with only a moment between the sound of the gun and the explosion, I carried shells to the mortar the dead man's brother served. I remember the look he gave me when I kneeled and let down the cloverleafs into his hands. The look said "Thanks." That look meant more to me than any praise I have had since.

A few years after the war I was living in Paris as a student, though little studenting I or my friends did, for we found the professors at the university ridiculous—all they seemed to care about was your pronouncing French correctly, they cared

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nothing for ideas. We spent our time in the cafés between St. Germain and Boul' Mich, talking about writers we admired.

I had still not recovered from the war. It was no trouble to see bodies lying about in my room, one with an arm held rigidly in the air, another with a knee drawn up. There was a German officer who kept reappearing on the furniture. I had first seen him lying on a mattress outside a house in Holland—he had been carried out of the house and left on the mattress to die in comfort, since when he had swollen so that his belly was bursting his trousers and his arms and legs extended stiffly like balloons. Now he had got off the mattress somehow and would turn up in my room at odd times, perching on a chair and looking at me. I offered him a cigarette which he refused, producing a packet of small black cigars from a pocket. Turkish, he said, which he preferred.

One night I dreamed that I was walking with other shadowy figures along what seemed to be the bank of a canal, when bullets slashed the trees and shells were falling. I woke and wrote out the dream, and as I wrote remembered . . . it wasn't a dream, it had actually happened. For one of the symptoms of the mental disorder that came after the war was amnesia . . . there were bright patches with darkness all around. Now this scene came back clearly.

I wrote it as a poem. I had been reading Heine's ballads, and the poem took the form of a ballad. As it was a poem, not just a memory, I was free to invent.

Tell me, Master-Sergeant,
The way to turn and shoot.
But the Sergeant's silent
That taught me how to do it.

O Captain, show us quickly
Our place upon the map.
But the Captain's sickly
And taking a long nap.

Lieutenant, what's my duty,
My place in the platoon?

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He too's a sleeping beauty,
Charmed by that strange tune.

Carentan O Carentan
Before we met with you
We never yet had lost a man
Or known what death could do.

The poem is well known, insofar as poetry can be known in our time, but I once read an article in which the writer said that it was only a "tour de force." He found fault with what he called the worst stanza.

Everything's all right, Mother,
Everyone gets the same
At one time or another.
It's all in the game.

When I wrote that stanza I was not thinking of myself but the man who died near me calling on his mother. It is true . . . this is a simple stanza, but these were simple men. They were not literary critics. Most of the hard and dangerous work of the world is done by such men. During the war I learned to respect them and have done so ever since.

I have earned my living by teaching in universities. The people around me, with a few exceptions, could not understand the basis of my thought . . . that words to me were pale in comparison with experience, mattered only insofar as they transmitted experience. In recent years, with the spread of what is called theory, I have come to dislike some of my colleagues very much, those who have taken their text from Saussure and who teach that there is no direct connection between words and life, only between one word and another, one "sign" and another.

There is another kind of person who fills me with dislike. One evening at dinner in New York a woman told me that she thought it terrible that I, a poet, had been in the war. She had a son who was about to enter Columbia and he would never take up arms.

No, I thought, some other man will do his fighting for him.

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The Mouth of Fame

What a thing to be in the mouth of fame.
—Keats

I was renting an apartment in the East Fifties, a fairly large room with a kitchen along one side. Nick Carraway says that life is much more successfully looked at from a single window, but mine faced a brick wall.

According to the terms of the divorce, my very young son, Matthew, could visit on weekends. We would go to Central Park and the Zoo or the Museum of Natural History, perhaps a movie. I played with him, made dinner, and put him to bed. Then I worked at my writing. A few years before when I was living in France I published a book of poems. It received two or three encouraging reviews, but I had published it at my own expense and you weren't an author until you had a publisher. My poems were appearing in magazines and I was putting another book together.

I worked as an associate editor for a publishing house. I got there at nine, pulled out the bottom desk drawer, put my feet up, and read a manuscript. When I had read enough to know what I thought I would type a brief description and my opinion, and start the pile that would go to the editor-in-chief, J. B., at the end of the day. He would either reject the manuscript or pass it on to a second reader. Beside myself there were Michael Gallagher and Frieda Bunsen. When we disagreed, J. B. would make the final decision.

Sometimes he let one of us edit a manuscript that had been accepted for publication. Or confer with an author about needed revisions. I cut 300 pages out of a historical novel and wrote chapters in the author's style to join the hemorrhaging parts. The author, a Frenchman, wouldn't mind so long as he received his royalties. I rewrote the English sentences of a German who had designed rockets for Hitler and was now designing them for us.

J. B. was more than a boss, he was a friend. At the office he was too busy to exchange more than a few words with you. He was conferring with authors and agents, with the Vice President

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in Charge of Sales or the Office Manager. But you were invited to his house on Saturday, and sometimes to sleep over. He lived out on Long Island, and I looked forward to these excursions, a welcome change from my brick wall. The train unrolled houses half-hidden among leaves, green fields, and glimpses of the sea. I was approaching the real thing, Fitzgerald's "green breast of the New World."

At the office J. B. wore a business suit, some dark color . . . on the Island it was loafers and jeans. He had two daughters by his second marriage, Jennifer and Julia, fourteen and twelve, and a boy, Henry, by his first. His present wife, Milly, was on friendly terms with Henry's mother, and Henry got on well with the girls. There'd be a game of softball with the neighbors' children or we'd go picnicking on the beach.

In the afternoon people would drop by . . . the lawyer who lived next door, a woman "in theater," an author or two, some strange fish among them. There was a Hungarian who was writing a novel based on his experiences as a refugee during World War II. J. B. had given him a contract and I had read the novel . . . it was deadly dull. He smoked cigarettes with a long holder, and kissed the women's hands, and they thought he was charming.

After dinner there would be another gathering. Some of the afternoon people might reappear, better dressed, but there would be people who had been specially invited: the author of a current bestseller, a well-known psychiatrist, an actress who was playing a leading role. The conversation would be lively, usually about politics, but it might be about psychoanalysis, or someone's trip abroad. Or even baseball . . . J. B. was an expert on the subject. If the discussion threatened to become too serious, if someone was disagreeing warmly, J. B. would throw in a remark that brought the talk around to the World Series. He had a favorite saying, "Stay loose," that came from baseball. He was a fan of the Reds . . . he grew up in Cincinnati.

Not everyone appreciated these diversions. "What is this American folly, bazeboll?" the Hungarian asked. He had been interrupted in the midst of a diatribe against the Soviet Union. People stared at him in silence. They were liberals . . . after this evening he was not invited back.

And Milly, J. B.'s wife, was not so mild. If there was a heated argument she would add fuel to the flames. She was like the

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Druid priestesses Tacitus describes, dressed in white robes, urging the warriors to battle. Then you saw that she had had one or two drinks too many. At this point J. B. would try to distract her, leading her aside. This would make her angry and her voice would rise. Mike Gallagher, my associate at the publishing house, told me that he had witnessed some late-night scenes that were sensational: a woman throwing the contents of her glass in another woman's face. Their husbands inviting each other to step outside.

*

At our editorial conference, J. B. clued us in on what people were reading these days and asked for book ideas. Scribner's was about to publish a novel about World War II, a blockbuster, the biggest thing since *The Naked and the Dead*. Rumor had it that the advance notices were excellent and that Scribner's was planning full-page ads. Where was our novel about World War II?

I recalled that some months ago, when two novels about the war were in the house and both Gallagher and I gave one of them very good reports, J. B. told us to forget it . . . no one was interested in the war these days.

J. B. was staring at me . . . was something wrong? No, I assured him, and he continued. There was a market for nonfiction adventure. Look at *Annapurna* and *Kon-Tiki*. Where, I said to myself, was our book about a raft?

That night at the Blue Mill, Gallagher's favorite restaurant, over steaks and french fries we discussed the conference. Had I noticed, Mike said, how many first novels by women we were publishing? J. B. met them at parties, women who'd published a story when they were in college and had written nothing since, not till J. B. discovered them.

"You do know, don't you, about J. B. and Frieda?"

I stared at him in astonishment.

"Didn't he ask you to let him use your apartment one afternoon?"

He had, as a matter of fact. To catch up on some reading. But I hadn't noticed anything, the apartment was just as I left it, nothing out of place.

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What, Mike said, would I have expected to find if I'd known? Dirty bedsheets?

Hadn't I noticed that when he or I wrote a favorable book report, and Frieda disagreed, J. B. would invariably take her side? And that two of the books J. B. had signed contracts for recently we hadn't even seen, but Frieda liked them.

But the Burner, as Mike calls Frieda Bunsen, leaves to be an editor at another house, and we don't have to worry . . . the days flow smoothly again, reading manuscripts and writing reports.

Now and then I rise from my desk and go over to the window and look down a canyon to the Hudson and the funnels of ocean liners. I could take one and be back on the Left Bank, breathing the atmosphere of art . . . wine and Gauloise cigarette smoke. Or England . . . I saw very little of England during the war, only the green fields where we practiced platoon tactics and the dark, unlighted streets that led to the pub. But I don't have the price of the ticket . . . alimony and child support payments keep my nose glued to the job.

I am writing jacket copy for a historical novel set in Old Virginia. Barbara Cheveley is torn between her gratitude to Ronald Fairbough, a British captain of dragoons who saved her father's life, and her fascination with "Red Hugh" O'Malley, a smuggler with a price on his head. She does not know that O'Malley is, in fact, an officer in Washington's army, entrusted by the General with the most secret of missions, on which the fate of the army and the Revolution depends. The traitor Benedict Arnold plays a pivotol part in the story. In *Two Swords for Barbara Cheveley* the author has given us once more the heady mixture of history and romance that won uncounted readers for *Traitor's Wife* and *Lord Lovat's Daughter*. Her new readers have a treat in store.

A shape looms over me . . . a stout woman with red hair, leaning on a cane. She lowers herself heavily on the chair next to my desk. She is holding a box in her lap . . . the manuscript, she says, I rejected . . . her biography of Elbert Hubbard. She stares at me, and I remember: when I opened the box there was a smell of mildew, and as I turned the pages a letter fell out, a letter of rejection dated . . . twenty years ago!

I try to think of something to say, and find myself using the words of our standard letter of rejection, about "the limitations of our budget." The red-haired woman continues to glower. Or

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is it a wig? She looks like Doctor Johnson. When I have finished speaking she leans forward. "Young man," she says, "you are a fool." For a moment the beautiful temptation flutters before me . . . it's not the first time I've seen her fanning her wings, the idea of simply saying to a writer, "Go to hell." But my paycheck puts a finger to her lips and I am silent. The biographer of Elbert Hubbard gathers her manuscript to her bosom, rises heavily, and lurches out. On the way she passes the office of Elisabeth O'Shaughnessy, our publicity woman, and leans in at the door . . . apparently she knows her. Betty looks up with a smile. "Don't smile at me with all your teeth, Miss O'Shaughnessy!" the old woman shouts, shaking her cane in the air, and makes an exit.

*

For some time Gallagher had been having an affair with the wife of a fashion photographer. She was given to taking off her clothes at parties. This didn't seem to bother her husband but it bothered Mike. He had always had a drinking problem but now he came late to work and would go out for a nip now and then. He dozed through the afternoon, slumped in his chair . . . you could actually hear him snore. Beatrice, the Office Manager's assistant, who sat at a desk across from me, slipped out to snitch on Mike.

J. B. had a heart-to-heart talk with Mike. He asked me to pitch in, to finish the anthology of love stories Mike had contracted to put together for the firm, and I wrote brief biographies of the authors. But the situation couldn't continue and J. B. had to let Mike go. He found a position as speech-writer for the president of CBS. Then he married an Italian who worked at the United Nations, and she took him with her to Rome.

Then J. B. left, to be an editor with a much bigger house. I visited him there and he showed me around. His office was palatial compared to the modest quarters he had previously occupied. There was a large bathroom adjoining his office, with a television set so that he could see the programs of the station that was affiliated with the publishing house. We were entering a new era, he told me . . . books would be aimed at television.

At a meeting of our staff with the new editor who was taking J. B.'s place I made an innocuous remark, and the Vice President in Charge of Sales turned on me savagely. "The

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trouble with you," he said, "is that you're sorry J. B. isn't here." I was taken aback. He continued in this vein . . . he must have been harboring venomous feelings towards me for some time. I had always detested him, with his foxy face and dapper suits, but I had thought he liked me. I used to listen to his stories about the publishing business.

I looked around the room. There wasn't one there who hadn't been J. B.'s friend or pretended to be, and there wasn't one who had a good word to say about him now that he'd left. It was time for me to be leaving . . . not just this wretched bunch, I had to get out of the business. I had no interest in developing "book ideas," saw no reason to persuade someone to write a book if he didn't have the urge. And I felt the irony of helping others to write books when I should be writing my own. I wasn't cut out for a career in publishing.

I knew a man of my own age who was. At a party in the Village at which the usual faces were present, first novelists and two or three who had a reputation, he explained that getting someone to write a book was simple: "You have to have a subject, then you write out what you know." It was evident, he said, when a writer didn't really know the subject. You could tell.

In that case, I thought, I'm not a writer, for I don't have a subject . . . mountain-climbing, crossing the Pacific on a raft, not even World War II. All I have is a love of writing, and it doesn't have to be my own.

There was one thing I could do. In order to supplement my income I had been teaching a section of English composition at Columbia, in the School of General Studies. I could go into teaching. I would have to obtain a Ph.D.—this was the prerequisite for teaching in a university, and any other kind would be drudgery. The G. I. Bill would pay for my courses and I could teach two sections of composition.

*

The woman with the red wig has had her revenge—I have not been able to put her out of my mind. Perhaps some people exist just to make an impression. She reappears, looming over me, shaking her walking stick. She is still carrying the box that contains the life of Elbert Hubbard. With her is the man who

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brought us a manuscript wrapped around with a chain and lock. When I asked him why, he said that for years Irving Berlin had been entering his apartment and stealing his songs.

There is the woman with the mating machine. In the picture it looks like an electric chair. You are to place your prospective mate in it and pull a switch. The pointer will swing so many degrees. You match this with your own score and make some calculations. Then you compare your friend's astrological sign with yours and consult a chart that tells you what to expect. Then you must consider: do you like each other? Are you compatible?

I told her that due to the limitations of our budget we could not publish her book. Her elbow began rapping on my desk and she trembled from head to toe. Beatrice slipped out of the door to warn the Office Manager that a crisis was impending. The woman with the mating machine spoke: "I hear you were in San Francisco."

Yes, I said, I had been there on my vacation.

"What," she said, "did they tell you about me?"

I see you too, old man with white hair and pince-nez glasses and little smile as though you have a secret. And indeed you do, an incredibly pornographic novel about young girls.

I see you all dimly, as manuscripts walking, spotted with mildew and soup stains. The despised and rejected. How much more interesting you were in person than the books you wrote!

To the Reader:

"In Transit" and "Lessons of the Body" are factual accounts. But writing memoirs presents an obstacle: there are times when to describe what actually happened might hurt someone. How can you get around the difficulty? The way Max Beerbohm did in *Seven Men*, Harold Nicolson in *Some People* and, of course, the author of *Remembrance of Things Past*, by placing yourself as you were, and behaving as you would have, among imaginary scenes and characters. This is what I have done in "The Mouth of Fame." Any resemblance between the characters and people who have lived or are living now is purely coincidental. Nowhere else in these memoirs have I felt it necessary to write in this way.

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THOMAS M. DISCH

Sunday Morning, in the Laundry Room

> Your home is a pleasant place from which you draw happiness.
> —Fortune Cookie, Nov. 15, 1991

How long since these were washed?
At least two years. The crimped edges
At the top had gone beyond off-white
To zebra stripes of dirt and dinge.

When they're clean, they're kind of glamorous,
With a Jean Harlowish, shimmery glow,
But their laundering means not just getting up
On the ladder to get them down, but while I'm there

Cleaning the moldings and the curtain rail,
Plus the suddenly accessible windowsills
With all their clutter of plants and elephants,
Then the bookshelves behind the couch

And the floor behind the shelves, grungy
With the dry gritty soot peculiar
To Manhattan. It's a whole morning's work
To get the curtains for four windows clean.

Ah, but then! With the furniture back in place,
The elephants safe behind their jungle scrim
Of coleus and crassula, the shelves
And sills and curtains all bright as the ads

For the All that transformed them,—
Then is the Protestant Work Ethic
At one with the worship of Hedon,
To whose devotions I may now return immaculate.

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Smile!

So we're cajoled in the poems of the prairies
Penned by the biddies who ruled the roosts
From 1890 to 1910.
Be agreeable. Think pink thoughts
And the world will allow you the legroom you need.
And would you believe it, it's perfectly true:
Well-directed smiles will pay
Regular dividends even today. How else
Are beauty contests or elections won
Than with a winning smile, which assures
The smile's recipient of this cowpoke's
Acquiescence to the norms set down
In the decalogues of common sense:
I won't kill you, or rape your dependents,
Or set fire to your house. It's a frail
Reassurance, which a many a man on a horse
With a gun at his side has betrayed,
And yet, still, most civilized people
Remain unafraid, so long as one smiles
In a way that's convincing. "Have a nice day,"
Our derelicts say, with an irony tinged
With a savvy degree of deference, for if
We thought that their least solicitations
Were a threat to life, we'd all become
Bernard Goetzes toting Lugers in the IRT.
Smile therefore, and indicate a readiness
To oblige even those people you dislike,
As long as they've paid for their tickets. They,
Sensing this, may choose not to shoot you.

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Frames of the Annenberg Collection

Could she have known how many millions of francs
The publisher of *TV Guide* would one day spend
To have this record of what appears to have been
The most boring day of her life, would this
Nameless mademoiselle have perked up? She might not
Have much liked M. Monet's slapdash brushwork,
But surely she'd have found this frame irresistible
With its scallops and perforations and distressed gilt,
A frame that would quite overwhelm anything in it
Except for the fact that all the other paintings here
Have been gussied up just as flagrantly—
As though the paintings were correlative
To those wives of millionaires who must declare
Their husbands' gross incomes and net worth
By wrapping themselves in some insignificant fraction
Of the unthinkable total, as who would say,
"There it stands—" (The wife or the work of art.)
"The single costliest thing in this room,
And I own it." Naked, the painting could not
Express half what its owner would have it say.
Did he, one wonders, when alone with his Monet,
Take off its frame and enjoy the special privileges
Of ownership? And when he has joined the painter
In eternity, will they be on speaking terms?
When he is introduced to the young lady,
In heaven's grand salon, will she find him
As boring as she seems to have found M. Monet?

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JOSEPH EPSTEIN

Felix Emeritus

Felix Arnstein was dismantling his library. It would, he decided, have to be reduced by at least three-fourths, possibly more. At the Northwood Apartments, the old-age home (no euphemisms, for Felix, thank you all the same) into which, after much thought, he had resignedly decided he must now move, there was scarcely room to accommodate even a fourth of his books. Felix could have done nicely without the Northwood Apartments altogether, but the standard symptoms of old age had begun to show up in him with too great insistency. Clearly, there was now nothing for it but to make the move.

Still, Felix might have fought off this move if his various illnesses hadn't conspired to cause him to require so much medical attention. Along with his angina attacks, Felix had colitis, and now, in his late seventies, diabetes had shown up. If his mind seemed to be closing down on him at a considerately slow pace, his body was closing in much more relentlessly. These days he seemed to spend more time in doctors' offices and in hospitals than out of them. At the Northwood Apartments there was a physician on the premises and nursing care when needed. He would get, in addition, all his meals, maid service, his laundry done, haircuts, a bedroom, bath, and small sitting room—all this for $1,700 a month. Between his income from his pension from the university, his social security checks, and the small royalties that his books still brought in, he could afford it easily.

The last time Felix had given a little dinner party, he had begun to run water to wash the dinner dishes in the kitchen sink while serving the dessert, napoleon bought at the Tag Bakery on Central Street. Half an hour or so later, a phone call from the occupants of the apartment downstairs informed him that water was coming through their kitchen ceiling. The water, of course, was caused by Felix neglecting to turn off the water running in his kitchen sink. This was the third time it had happened.

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Constanze, Felix's sister, worrying about his having further angina attacks, insisted that he buy a portable telephone, so that, should he have another attack or even fall in his apartment, he would have the phone ready at all times to call her or at least to dial 911, the emergency number. This all sounded reasonable enough, except that Felix kept misplacing the new phone; being portable, it was also misplaceable. Then there was the morning he woke to find that all the electricity had gone off in the apartment, only to discover, upon calling Commonwealth Edison, that he had neglected to pay his electric bills for the past four months.

No, Felix had to admit that, approaching eighty, he was losing—if not, thank God, his taste for and interest in things of the mind—his ability to concentrate on the quotidian details of life. These had never, true enough, been his strong line. Until now, though, they had never threatened to sink him. He was able to get by, to make do, but, little as he liked to own up to it, apparently no longer. Who was it who said that a man is likely to hang himself on the loose threads of his life? Felix couldn't remember.

Felix decided that he must give up his volumes of Fontane. He would retain his Karl Kraus, his Thomas Mann, his Robert Musil. The one hundred and forty-three volumes of his great Weimar edition of Goethe would have to go, of course. Also the many volumes of von Hofmannsthal; a lovely man, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, but, truth to tell, not a writer of the first class. Werfel and Zweig, out; so, too, his volumes of Zuckmayer, though he would retain the autobiography, a lovely, cleanly written book. His Ernst Jünger volumes, out also; a Nazi, Jünger, but a real writer nevertheless. Ah, the mysterious contradictions of art. Out, too, the books of Joseph Roth.

A bachelor, Felix had tried to keep himself free of too many possessions. He enjoyed travel, spent many of his summers in Tuscany. On three different occasions he had lived for an entire academic year at other universities—at Harvard, at Oxford, at Stanford—residing in other people's houses and apartments. He thought of himself as travelling light through life, unencumbered, disentangled, a free man. Yet he now saw that he had nonetheless managed to accumulate a great deal. He must have nearly two thousand books in this small apart-

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ment. Then there was the furniture; simple enough Scandinavian things mostly, bought in the 1950s, meant more for utility than for comfort—how different from the richly ornate furniture he had grown up with as a boy and young man in Vienna—but now pretty well worn out. Most of this would not go with him. He would take his reading chair to the Northwood Apartments and his desk and a small couch and chest of drawers. The rest would be dealt with by the Salvation Army people, called in by his sister.

Dear Connie was helping him with this move. She, his only surviving relative, and her husband Moritz, who worked as a chemist at Abbott Laboratories, were all that remained of Felix's family. The rest had been murdered by the Nazis. Felix, Connie, and Moritz had been in America for more than forty years, yet all three still retained their Viennese accents, their old-world ways. Felix could remember to this day the terror that he felt, departing the ship upon his arrival in London in 1946, when he realized that he would have to wrestle with and conquer the English language. Conquer it he had never quite succeeded in doing, at least not as a speaker. But all his books had been written in English, and over the years more than one reviewer remarked on his mastery of English prose style—a source of pride to Felix. He was nearly thirty when he had left Vienna, and while he had left it for good, having only returned once, and then with the most complicated of feelings, its accent had never left him; and also, let the truth be known, in many respects its way of looking at things.

Felix's fate had been that of permanent exile. Much about America he loved. The country had been good to him. By all accounts his had been a successful, even distinguished career. He had published six books of criticism, was the Haverling Distinguished Professor of European Literature at his university, had been a major contributor on his subject to the *Times Literary Supplement* in London—he was highly regarded in England, which, as a bit of an Anglophile, much pleased him. Yale had offered him a professorship and so, too, had the University of California, at Berkeley, but he could not bear to leave permanently his sister and her husband, who gave his life such ballast as it had.

For Felix was in reality a double exile, or so he had long

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thought himself. Along with his living away from the country of his birth—Arnsteins had lived in Vienna since early in the eighteenth century—Felix's secondary exile had to do with his homosexuality. It was something with which he had long ago learned to live. But well before that he recognized that it had put him outside what he thought of as regular life. A card that life had dealt him, such was how he had taken his homosexuality when he first recognized it in his late adolescence, and he had since come to learn that the pack of life was full of such jokers. His homosexuality gave him freedom from certain kinds of responsibility—from women, from children—but it also cut him off, sometimes he felt in fundamental ways, from the simple everyday pleasures of life and it made him realize that he had, in a way that men with children had not, only one life to lead.

His age and his bad health had in any case caused Felix for some years to be beyond sexual activity. He alternated in his view of homosexuality as a mixed blessing, rather like the bow of Philoctetes in the Greek myth, and as an all but unbearable complication. Although Felix had his arguments with Freud, and especially with the Freudians' peculiar way of twisting literature to make their master's points, he nonetheless believed Freud when of homosexuality he wrote that it could not be changed by therapy because, essentially, you could not persuade anyone to give up something that gave him intense pleasure. Felix was what he was—though, he reflected, his illnesses long ago having rendered him sexually *hors de combat*, he was perhaps no longer even quite that. He was, he supposed, if an exact category were wanted, a former homosexual.

Bitterest of bitter ironies, the one time in his life that Felix did not feel in exile was during the three years he spent at Buchenwald. Hateful dark years, monstrous in every way, and yet now, in retrospect, Felix sometimes viewed them as a period when he lived without the weight of introspection, lived chiefly with survival on his mind, lived truly in a community, however degraded and humiliated a community the one shared with his fellow captives might have been. It was not something he had ever spoken about, not even to Connie or Moritz, both of whom were able to elude the Nazis in their successful flight to America. Nor did he ever advertise himself as a survivor of the Nazi camps; he even avoided short-sleeve shirts lest the still

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unfaded tattooed number on his forearm show. He did not want his days in the camps to define his entire life, thus giving Hitler, or so he thought, the ultimate victory over him.

Felix had met many people who did, who thought and spoke of little else but the camps, for whom the subject swallowed up their entire lives. It was not difficult to understand why. At least once a month, sometimes more, Felix himself would dream about those dreadful days at Buchenwald; these dreams were of course nightmarish, as the days there had been. But, hideous though they were, at Buchenwald for the only time in his life did Felix not feel himself somehow separate and alone, an exile. Many were the oddities of life—many more, he had come to realize, than he would have time to contemplate.

All this was fine with Felix, who, after Buchenwald, had determined as best he could to enjoy and be amused by life. This seemed to him more sensible than to be perpetually tragic and endlessly shocked by it. Men were capable of enormous bestiality; he had been witness to that. Imperfectibility was the lot of mankind; this, too, could scarcely go without notice. But men could also be immensely kind and good-hearted, full of unexpected generosity and even sweetness. Also pathetic in their pretensions. Of pathetic pretensions Felix had seen more than his fill as a university teacher, where he daily noticed scores of little snobberies, as he watched his colleagues skate oh so perilously across the fragile ice of their thin status. Perhaps they sensed his amusement at this spectacle, for in his own department, that of comparative literature, he had no close friends. He was able to succeed not through academic politics—after Buchenwald, taking academic politics seriously was not quite possible for him—but because he had a reasonably high standing in the world of international culture.

Perhaps it was owing to his priding himself on the absence of snobbery that Felix had decided to move into the Northwood Apartments rather than one of two other retirement homes in the neighborhood: Hamilton House, which had no Jews that he knew of, and the Walter Roebuck Home, which was all male. Northwood Apartments was all Jewish, chiefly *Ostjuden* as far as he could tell, and lived in by both men and women, mostly widows and widowers. Its advantages included its being less expensive than Hamilton House, closer to the home of Connie

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and Moritz, and, as it seemed to him on his two inspection visits before moving in, livelier. It was bad enough being elderly and ill, Felix thought, one didn't have to be stuffy and dull into the bargain.

But no sooner had Felix moved into the Northwood than he began to wonder if he hadn't perhaps made a serious mistake. Part of the problem was living so exclusively among the old. Would he ever grow used to it? He doubted that he would. So many osteoporotic women, humped and bent forward; one woman, in an even crueler trick of nature, was bent backward, each of her steps seeming perilous, as if she were permanently backing away from the edge of a cliff. Every second person at Northwood seemed to wear a hearing aid, and some wore two—Felix's own hearing was not so good, though thus far he had resisted getting such a device—with the result that people seemed not to talk but to yell at one another. Because of bad hearing, too, few people answered to knocking on their doors. Metal canes with thick rubber bottoms were everywhere. One man, who Felix learned had had three strokes, trudged about on a walker, a piece of hideous aluminum scaffolding the mere sight of which never failed to lower Felix's spirits. No shortage of toupees among the men; nor wigs among the women. Eyesight everywhere was damnably dim, and it was common to see people reading the newspaper or letters with their heads only two or three inches from the paper. Conversation, at least much of it that Felix overheard, seemed to be chiefly about health, when it was not about death and the dead. The old women complained about the present, Felix noted, while the old men tended to lie about the past. Such, as Felix recalled hearing Miss Iris Godkin, the social director of Northwood, often call them, were "the golden years."

So many little Jewish women, Felix thought, when he came down to his first dinner at Northwood; they seemed, on the average, to be about 4′ 10″. But then Felix had long before noticed the propensity of age to shrink the small and make the tall blurry. He was one of the tall, 6′ 1″, and before his illnesses he had weighed 210 pounds. He assumed that he had himself become somewhat blurry, as if someone had fiddled with the contrast dial on his face, though, perhaps mercifully, his own eyesight was not good enough to know for certain. When

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checks came to him in restaurants, he could not always make out their sums, even with his glasses on. Still, Felix stood out among his fellow residents at Northwood as a veritable giant. The only one in the place taller than he was Miss Godkin, blonde and buxom, a real Wagnerian heroine, Felix thought, remembering that he never felt any regard for Wagner, no matter how much so intelligent a man as Thomas Mann may have struggled to come to terms with him. Wagner represented for Felix the worst of Teutonic culture: heavy, vastly overstated, grossly overdone, bloated, tinged all over with anti-Semitism.

Miss Godkin, walking about with a walkie-talkie of some sort in her hand, bright capped teeth always flashing, was unrelentingly, almost brutally cheerful. Miss Godkin felt it her duty to enforce a spirit of happiness among the denizens of Northwood Apartments. She would have smiled through an earthquake, Felix thought, perhaps planned on her deathbed to say to whoever it was who gathered around her, as her last words, what she said to everyone she encountered at Northwood: "Have a wonderful day!" It took considerable restraint on Felix's part not to respond to one of Miss Godkin's "Have a wonderful day"s by saying, as it often occurred to him to say, "An uneventful one will be sufficient, thank you all the same, madame."

But Miss Godkin was only one of the obstacles at Northwood. There was also Morris Manzelman, at whose regular table Felix had sat at lunch his second day at Northwood. The first time they met, this Manzelman, a short man with white hair and a carefully groomed white mustache, held out a small, manicured hand. "Morry Manzelman," he announced, "used to be Arrow Transport."

Felix did not at first pick up that Arrow Transport was the name of the small trucking company Manzelman had begun and worked at his entire life. His two sons, Arnold and Irwin, ran the company now. When Manzelman learned that Felix had taught in a university, he ever afterwards referred to him as Professor. Manzelman had a taste for jokes, but, regrettably, it didn't usually match Felix's taste in jokes. At breakfast, the third full day that Felix spent at Northwood, Manzelman, over a meal of bran-flakes, stewed prunes, prune juice, and hot

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chocolate, announced that he heard a good one the other day from a friend, Al Bergman, used to be a union agent, now retired in Florida.

"It seems, Professor, this fella, a widower, maybe he's sixty-five, moves into a retirement home. Pretty soon he sees that he's one of only three guys in the joint, the others being in their nineties and a bit gaga, if you know what I mean, and all the rest is women. A man who uses his *kop*, he sees that there is a chance for a bit of extra cash in a situation like this. So he puts up a sign on his door, 'Sex for Sale.' "

Manzelman paused for a long draught of prune juice.

"Pretty soon a little old broad, Ida Kessler by name, knocks on his door. 'I saw your sign,' she tells him, 'and I wonder how much you charge.' The fellow hadn't really thought about it before, so he says, on the spur of the moment, you know, he says, 'Well, five dollars for on the floor, ten dollars for on the couch over there, and twenty dollars for on the bed.' The lady opens a small change purse and takes out from it a twenty, which she hands to him. 'You want to do it on the bed, then?' the fella asks. 'No,' she says, 'four times on the floor.'"

Felix was not a rude man. But he found it difficult to respond properly to this joke told at eight in the morning. Manzelman seemed not to mind. The joy for him, Felix concluded, was as much in the performance as in the response. A pure kind of artist, this Manzelman.

That morning at breakfast they were joined by three other men. Felix later learned that two, like Manzelman, were widowers; the third had divorced his wife long before moving into Northwood. Apparently they met regularly at this table for meals. Felix, owing to his having sat with Manzelman two days in a row, was now considered a regular along with them, which meant that they expected him to eat all his meals at Manzelman's table. Wishing to avoid awkwardness, Felix went along.

"Professor," Manzelman said, "I'd like you to meet Sam Karzen, used to be Turner & Hess, Menswear; Harry Feldstein, used to be Linoleum City on Cermak Road; and Max Schindler, used to be Schindler & Rabinowitz, Plumbing. Boys, meet the Professor."

"Felix Arnstein," Felix said, putting out his hand, thinking

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perhaps he ought to add, "used to be Central European Literature."

Over their breakfasts, they carried on what Felix surmised must have been their normal conversation. "How bout those Cubs?" said Feldstein. "Do they stink or what?" Sam Karzen mentioned seeing a building for sale in the morning paper's real estate section that was going for $2.5 million. "You're not going to believe this, but I could have bought that same building, in 1938, for sixty-five grand," he said. "But in those days sixty-five grand looked like serious dough."

"Tell me about it," said Manzelman. "You could have had it for a song, but at that time who could afford sheet music. Right? Same old story."

Schindler said less than the others. He was a smallish man, with a nose that depended well over his upper lip, on which he had a dark but wispy mustache. He had large, fleshy ears. The expression on his face had a striking sourness, which gave him a look of perpetual discontent. Felix would later learn from Manzelman that the great event of Max Schindler's life was an acrimonious lawsuit against his deceased partner's sons—he himself had no children—for control of his and their dead father's plumbing company. It was a protracted lawsuit that, according to Manzelman, had cost Schindler hundreds of thousands of dollars and that he finally lost, forcing him out of the business.

"You boys heard about the widow Schwartz?" Manzelman asked. "She called the *Tribune* to place a death announcement for her late husband. The fella on the *Tribune* tells her that they charge by the word. 'O.K.,' she says, 'make it "Schwartz dead." ' 'No madame,' the fella from the *Tribune* says, 'there's a fifty-dollar minimum, and for that you get five words.' The widow thinks a minute, then she says, 'O.K. make it: "Schwartz dead. Cadillac for sale."' "

Yes, Felix wondered, moving into the Northwood Apartments may have been a serious mistake, but it was too late to do anything about it. This was, he knew, to be his last move but one, and that ultimate move was probably not all that far in the future. More than once Felix had told his sister that he didn't mind death so much as dying. But now, surrounded by the

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aged and the infirm, he realized that this was a cheap attempt at aphorism. Dying and death—the truth was, he minded both.

Felix never quite caught on to the rhythm of the almost ceaseless activity at Northwood. Miss Godkin was indefatigable, not only in her cheerfulness but in her determination, as Felix put it to himself, to enforce gregariousness among the residents. She planned endless activities, requiring only the least excuse and sometimes doing without that. There were Halloween parties and Chanuka parties and New Year's Eve parties; there were also Victorian teas, Hawaiian luaus, an Africa Safari Day, An Evening in the Orient, A Roman Orgy Supper. There was something called a "Spring Change Over," in which hairdressers came in and changed the hairdos of any woman at Northwood who was in the mood to do so. They were ready, too, to provide hairstyling for any of the men who wanted it, and a few did (for the first time in his life Felix felt himself fortunate to be bald). There was even a St. Patrick's Day party, for which Miss Godkin had decorated the large dining room and the other public rooms with cardboard shamrocks and leprechauns and green bunting and at which she arranged to have served a lunch of kosher corned beef and cabbage.

When the men met that morning at their regular table, Morry Manzelman, looking at all the green decorations, said, "This broad is really pushing it." Harry Feldstein, who tended, Felix noted, to take a somewhat simplistic view of human nature generally, added, "What this dame needs all the goddamn parties in the world ain't going to provide. One good *schtup* and maybe she'd calm down and we'd have a few less parties and a lot more peace and quiet around here." Felix noted that lots of women, in Feldstein's view, seemed to need one good *schtup*. It was his single idea, his *idée fixe*. A bit of a hedgehog, this man Feldstein, Felix reflected, remembering Isaiah Berlin's little essay, "The Hedgehog and the Fox." Felix knew Isaiah Berlin from his year at Oxford; a man full of interesting anecdotes and a love of gossip; he had sat with him more than once at high table at All Souls College. Now dining regularly with Manzelman, Karzen, Feldstein, and Schindler, Felix could scarcely be said to be quite at high table any longer.

"An old guy, maybe ninety-six, ninety-seven," Manzelman began at breakfast, "announces to his friends that he is going to

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marry a girl twenty-five. 'At your time of life, sex with a girl that young could be fatal,' a friend tells him. 'Look,' the old guy says, 'what can I do? If she dies, she dies.' "

Perhaps it was not the best morning for such a joke, for two days before Sam Karzen had had a stroke. He was in his early seventies, younger than Felix. Formerly in the clothing business, Karzen always dressed dapperly, but for another era. He put together fancy color combinations, matched up ties and socks with the handkerchiefs that flounced jauntily out of his jacket pocket, wore monogrammed shirts with French cuffs, had a gold key chain with the letters of his first name pending from his alligator belt with its initialed gold buckle, kept a dazzling shine on his buckled loafers. Karzen's stroke was not fatal—he was out of the hospital a week afterward—but now the left side of his face sagged, his jaw tended to go slack, and he had temporarily to use one of those wretched walkers. He resumed his seat at what Felix now thought of as the Manzelman table. Since his stroke, Karzen tended to stare out vacantly during conversation; his speech was slightly slurred. The old Jewish dandy had looked death in the eye, Felix sensed, and it had clearly left him stunned.

A strange way to live, Felix often thought since his move into Northwood. Everyone was waiting around for the inevitable. Cancer, stroke, heart attack, or, worst news of all, Alzheimer's disease. If you had the good fortune to reach your late seventies or early eighties, these were what awaited. Not even Miss Godkin's fierce smile could put them off. One day one of the familiar little women would not appear at her table in the dining room, and the word would go around that an embolism had taken her. The fellow who always wanted to talk about the stock market, and whom Felix one day heard shouting at another resident at Northwood that if he didn't use the *kop* God gave him, what the hell good was he, now this man's own *kop* was permanently stilled by a heart attack he suffered while sitting on the toilet in his apartment on the seventh floor. The rather handsome Mrs. Fay Bernstein, always so carefully dressed and coifed—still on the attack, still looking for a husband, Felix thought when first he saw her—was now out of the game, taken by a cerebral hemorrhage. Teitlebaum, a small, red-faced man, pudgy and robust, always a ready audience for

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Manzelman's jokes, used to be in the wholesale meat business, was swept away three weeks after he was found to have cancer of the pancreas. What awaited him, Felix? he wondered. He hoped for a clean, quick end. A heart attack in his sleep, or perhaps a swift stroke while reading in his chair—what he yearned for was a gentle *schtup* from God, as Harry Feldstein might have put it.

So much thought about death reminded Felix of his years at Buchenwald. Altogether too facile to compare this life with that, except to say that in both places the population was entirely Jewish and thoughts of death dominated and concentrated the mind. Who said that the knowledge that one would hang in a fortnight concentrated the mind? Samuel Johnson or Hobbes? Felix could not just now recall. But he did recall that it was Pascal who said that the human condition was everyone gathered in a room awaiting being called to be garrotted in the next room, without knowing which among them was to be called in next. Just so. Here at Northwood everyone knew he or she would be called into that room fairly soon.

But the comparison between the Nazi death camps and old age in a retirement home was ridiculous, Felix knew. Everyday terror was absent, for one thing; and, for another, here at Northwood one came and went as one pleased. Felix had dinner at least once a week—usually on Sunday—with Connie and Moritz. Sometimes they went to concerts together on Friday night at the Symphony downtown. He would occasionally accept an invitation from a former colleague and his wife at the university. Felix had met Manzelman's two sons, who picked up their father for Jewish holidays and for his grandchildren's birthdays and other family occasions. They were nice boys with rather ambitious hairdos, worn long in the back. Karzen sometimes spent a weekend with his daughter's family in the northern suburbs. Feldstein was taken by a nephew to baseball and football games; the day after, at breakfast, he would regale the table with accounts of how the games were fixed; another of his obsessions, evidently. Felix, having no interest in athletics, could not follow these conversations. He was hesitant and finally chose not to ask who a man frequently referred to—and always with vehemence—as "Ditka" might be.

The only man who never left Northwood was Max Schindler.

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No one ever picked him up. He never spoke of relatives. He seemed without friends outside the Manzelman table at Northwood. Even at the table he was not particularly friendly. Felix felt that there was something permanently dark about Schindler—dark and disappointed. Schindler did not much join in with the others at Manzelman's table and seemed less to participate than to observe, as if from the sidelines. Manzelman once told Felix that Schindler was extremely well balanced. "Do you think so?" asked Felix, not realizing he was falling for a joke. "Yes," said Manzelman, "he has a chip on both shoulders." Felix sensed that Schindler was thoughtful, but what he thought about was far from clear. Felix recalled that Schindler had had an apparently bitter divorce, had gone through long and expensive litigation that had cost him his business. For an American, Felix supposed, Schindler's life had not been easy.

Felix, too, had remained aloof at Northwood. He had tried to do so without seeming in any way unduly distant or cool. Everywhere around Northwood Apartments he was known as "the Professor." Among these retired businessmen, lawyers, physicians, and the widows of businessmen, lawyers, and physicians, he was doubtless considered something of an oddity, but not so much of one as to make anyone uncomfortable in his presence, or so Felix hoped. He shared with Max Schindler the quality of being a bit on the sidelines, of not being quite able to join wholeheartedly in the general atmosphere of Northwood, either in its aspect of false gaiety imposed by Miss Godkin or in its aspect of amused knowingness about the world—of having heard everything before—lent by Morry Manzelman.

It was on a Jewish holiday, Rosh Hashonah, that Felix went down to the dining room to find Schindler alone at their usual table. Manzelman, Feldstein, and Karzen were spending the evening with family. Schindler had no family, or at least none that he ever spoke of. And Connie and Moritz, secularized Viennese Jews that they were, did not celebrate Jewish holidays. The dining room at Northwood was nearly empty. A buffet of soup and sandwiches was set out. Felix approached the table with his food on a tray. Schindler was already eating, somewhat noisily, his soup.

"Sit down, Professor," he said. "Just the two of us here tonight. We'll get by fine without Manzelman's jokes, eh?"

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"Good evening, Mr. Schindler," said Felix. "The quiet is a nice change, I agree."

"I have to tell you, Professor, I tried to read your books," said Schindler, his nose no more than two inches above his soup. "I took two of them out from the local library, but I have to report it was no go."

"I am sorry to hear this," Felix said. "What seems to have been the problem?"

"I tried to read the one about this philosopher. Neetsy, is it?"

"On Nietzsche, yes."

"Too complicated, too abstract for me. I couldn't follow the damn thing, though I did at least understand that this Neetsy wrote about serious stuff. But tell me, do you only write about what other writers have written?"

Felix tried to ignore the condescension implicit in that description of his work, though he had to admit that, as pure description, it was accurate enough. "Yes, I suppose that is all I do," he said. "But you tell me, Mr. Schindler, do you find much time for reading?"

"Not that much," said Schindler. "I find writing much more interesting."

"Really?" said Felix. "And what do you write?"

"I've written a book about my life, an autobiography, I guess you'd call it, though it is maybe more about my thoughts about life than about my life itself."

"Sounds most interesting," said Felix.

"Do you think so?" said Schindler.

"Yes, yes, of course," said Felix.

"I've got a Xerox copy. I'll drop it off at your apartment later tonight."

Felix realized that he had made a serious mistake. Among academics it was understood that when you said that you thought the next person's writing was "most interesting" it certainly never for a moment meant that you wished to read it. But in Schindler he was not dealing with an academic but instead with someone who apparently took words for what they meant. He would have to be more careful in future. Too late now, though. When Felix left his rooms the next morning, there, at the door, in a brown grocery bag, was a Xerox copy of a three hundred and seventy-six page manuscript, written in

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rather careful handwriting, with the title *Dog Eat Dog, My Life and Thoughts* by Max C. Schindler.

Breakfast that morning began with Manzelman telling the story about the man who reports to his wife that, even though he wasn't able to produce his birth certificate, he was able to convince the bureaucrats at the Social Security office that he was old enough to collect Social Security by opening his shirt and showing them the white hair on his chest. " 'Oh, yeah,' said Manzelman, imitating the high and whining voice of a long-suffering wife, 'while you were at it, you should've opened your fly—you could've claimed disability.' "

Felix, still very much the literary critic, always looking for patterns in thought, wondered why so many of Manzelman's jokes seemed to be about impotence or excessive potency. Nothing on the surface funny about either subject, surely. Or was this some American craziness that, like many another, he had no hope of ever grasping?

Schindler, meanwhile, made no mention of his dropping off his manuscript. Nor did he mention it at lunch or at dinner. Felix sensed that he, Schindler, didn't want the other men at the table to know that he had written a book. Felix could certainly understand this. But he began to feel a certain pressure about reading the manuscript, which he didn't look forward to doing. Plowing through all those pages written in longhand, for one thing. For another, what sort of lies would he tell Schindler after he read it? Schindler, he sensed, was not a man whom one could put off with gracious evasions. He would somehow have to find a way to tell him the truth without hurting him. But first he would have to read the wretched thing.

Felix put off reading Schindler's manuscript for more than a week. It sat there in its brown bag, like a sack of tomatoes first ripening and then going bad, on the floor beside his small desk. Merely to look at it gave Felix a bad conscience; and in his small apartment at Northwood, he could not evade looking at it for long. Yet, Felix said to himself, it remained easier to feel guilty about the manuscript than actually to read the damn thing. Schindler, meanwhile, still made no mention of it.

Finally, Schindler's stoicism and his own bad conscience got to Felix. One evening after dinner, up in his sitting room, he removed the thickish Xerox copies of the original manuscript

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pages, and, exhaling deeply, like a man setting out to swim in a cold and choppy sea, he plunged in. Schindler's handwriting was far from illegible. And his manuscript, Felix found, was far from unreadable. It was, in fact, immensely readable without being particularly good. Perhaps Felix had lingered too long in his professional life over Kafka and Kraus, Musil and Mann, but he had developed a taste for the dark in literature, even though his own temperament tended toward the sweet and sunny. And if you liked dark, then you had to be interested in what Schindler had written, which was unrelievedly dark.

Dog Eat Dog turned out to be Max Schindler's *apologia*. It was an *apologia*, however, with an interesting twist. Schindler's defense of his own life was not that he was better than the rest of mankind, but that he was merely no worse, if only because it was impossible to be worse. The saga began with Schindler's parents, who he felt had betrayed him. His younger brother, he early discovered, was their favorite child. He, Schindler, was put to work once he had completed high school, while both parents sacrificed to send this brother to dental school. (The brother died, of a heart attack, in his forties.) Behind his parents' religion, Schindler found nothing but fear; he found their yearning for respectability pathetic. Outside the home, going to school, he everywhere ran into anti-Semitism: among the Irish and Polish children with whom he went to school and among his Protestant teachers, whom he now confidently felt had held him back. Accounts were offered of various bosses who cheated and insulted and humiliated Schindler in his youthful jobs.

And then sex entered Schindler's life, or at any rate his manuscript—and things promptly became worse. Schindler described without embarrassment the blistering heat of his own adolescent urgings. These, as he wrote, "found no surcease" in his young manhood. However great his attraction to women, just that great, it seemed, was their revulsion from him. In Schindler's pages—and Felix felt that he could not read more than fifty or so of them at a sitting—all men were beasts, all women whores. But the greatest whore of all was the woman he eventually married. She, before the second year of their marriage was out, cuckolded Schindler with his own brother, the dentist, and later with other men, thus setting him forever

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outside his own family. After his divorce, Schindler never again entered into anything resembling a serious relationship with a respectable woman, but instead, once a month or so, took his trade to prostitutes, who, as he recounted in *Dog Eat Dog*, were "a good deal more honest or straightforward than any respectable woman I was likely to meet." In his manuscript, he talked of his meetings with prostitutes as having "his ashes hauled." Felix wondered what the etymology of such an expression might be.

Apart from the few prostitutes he frequented, the only other person in his book for whom Schindler had a good word was his business partner. Here though, Felix, a close reader, could not help but notice that, while he said that his partner was a relatively honest and dependable man, he, Schindler, never referred to him by anything other than his last name, Rabinowitz. And many more pages in *Dog Eat Dog*—a venomous forty-three-page chapter, in fact—were devoted to Schindler's lengthy lawsuit with Rabinowitz's sons. These included lengthy attacks on lawyers, on municipal corruption, on the unfitness of judges, on the inaccessibility of justice through the courts, and on the venality and greed of the young and old alike.

When Felix set the last page of Schindler's manuscript on his lap, he felt a mixture of relief and odd kind of admiration for the man. Schindler was often ungrammatical and sometimes pitifully awkward in straining after grandiloquent effects ("no surcease"), but one had to recognize his manuscript's relentless bleakness of tone. In three hundred and seventy-six pages Schindler had not once lapsed into humor (except of the bitterest kind), affectionate feeling, or, so far as Felix could tell, dishonesty. Somehow, while recounting the ghastly treatment he had met with through his life, Schindler never set himself up as someone whose own splendid virtues deserved better of life. On the contrary, he made it quite plain, this was the way life was. This was human nature. Men were pigs, women and money were the filth they rolled in. What more could one expect? It was quite a performance.

The question that soon occurred to Felix was why had Schindler given this book to him to read. Did he think that Felix might help him to get it published? That was not a possibility; apart from its literary crudities, libel laws alone insured the

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book's being unpublishable. Did he want Felix's admiration? Perhaps though, if so, then only in a limited way, or so Felix thought. He may have wanted Felix to know that he, Schindler, too, was a highly sapient fellow, a writer of a sort, and not merely one who wrote only about other men's writings—odd, Felix reflected, even the slightest insult stuck in one's memory—but out of hard, direct experience. Felix knew enough about writing to know that no one writes merely for himself, no matter how unregarding he may claim to be about the rest of the world. What Felix finally concluded was that Schindler's book was a cry from the heart; and that though until now Schindler had no one to cry out to, with the advent in his life of Felix Arnstein, himself obviously a thoughtful man, there was finally someone who would understand both the pain the world had inflicted on Max Schindler and his, Schindler's, need to leave some record of it, though for whom and to what purpose was, again, far from clear.

The question that now confronted Felix was how to answer this cry for understanding from this sad yet otherwise altogether unattractive man, a man who had gone through life quite loveless and without any of the world's small rewards of achievement, recognition, simple pleasure in daily activity, a man whose only victory, if victory it could be counted, was survival. Felix could not, in good conscience, greet Schindler as a fellow human sufferer—*mon semblable, mon frère*—for even though, by most measures, he, Felix, had been provided a larger bowl of the world's bitter provender, he did not find life anywhere near so dread an affair as Schindler. Yet he could not go on living in the same building with this man, taking most of his meals with him, and not formally recognize that he, Max C. Schindler, used to be in the plumbing business, had been allowed a look into the darkness of the human heart.

"An old guy," said Morry Manzelman at breakfast, "maybe he's a hundred and four, maybe a hundred and five, he complains to his doctor that he thinks he's slowing down sexually. The doctor, amazed that the old guy even has a sex life at all, asks him when he first noticed this. 'Oh, last night,' says the old timer, 'and then again this morning.' "

Felix looked at Schindler when Manzelman had finished his joke. He was smiling, politely, Felix felt, perhaps even perfunc-

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torily. What could Schindler possibly think of a man such as Morry Manzelman? Or Sam Karzen, dressed up with his mouth gaping slightly from his stroke; or Harry Feldstein, with his sex panacea for all the world's troubles? What did he think of Felix himself? Not easily known, of course, but Felix suspected that he thought the men he dined with dupes, fools who preferred not to look life in the face, as he had done, and take it for the horrendous business it was.

Another two weeks had gone by and Felix had still not told Schindler that he had read his book. Yet, having read it, he thought of Schindler differently. For how long could a man carry such a load of disgust and loathing for the world? Schindler, according to his book, had done so for some decades. What was behind all the hatred for life in *Dog Eat Dog*? Felix, when he thought about it, had perhaps greater reasons for sustaining a permanent grudge against life: there was his enforced exile from the country of his birth, the true horrors he had seen and lived with at Buchenwald, his own congenital inability to lead a normal family life. Felix did not think that he underestimated the difficulties and darkness that life was capable of putting before a man, but next to Schindler he was almost childlike in his cheerfulness.

What Felix and Schindler shared, or so Felix concluded, was their singleness, their detachment, their condition, as the French called it, of *célibataire*, which meant finally their aloneness in the world. Here Schindler far outdid him, Felix knew. But neither of them, the old literary critic in Felix also knew, propelled any plot; each existed in a state of rather terrifying inconsequence. Whatever they did, including the discourteous yet inevitable act of dying, the world would in no serious way be altered. Felix did not believe in God, even though he noticed he would on occasion invoke his name; the best he could manage by way of a position on this truly most interesting of questions was the rather boring one of hopeful agnosticism. Yet the oblivion likely in lieu of an afterlife that was the most likely outcome promised by this position held its own terrors. But there were no satisfactory answers to these momentous questions, not for Felix there weren't. He had long ago decided, against the advice of the poet, to "go gently into that good night," though he wished he could be a bit more certain about

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how gentle it was going to be. Schindler, on the other hand, as his book made plain, intended to go screaming into the same night. In the end, of course, go they both would, and each would be lost in the darkness. Perhaps Schindler and Felix shared more than he, Felix, had at first realized.

Normally, Felix made it a point to avoid Miss Godkin's special events evenings, though he often forgot to check the bulletin board in the main lobby of Northwood, where notification of them was always posted. So when he came down to his evening meal, he was surprised to discover that he had walked into Viva Mexico! Night. He was greeted at the door to the dining room by the Brünnhilde-like Miss Godkin.

"Hello, Professor," she exclaimed, in a rich sing-song voice. She was wearing a long black gown, very decolleté, revealing an enormous shelf of bosom, with a rhinestone-studded mantilla and a rose in her blonde hair. "Or should I say, *Buenos noches*?" and she twice clicked her heels against the parquet dining room floor.

Felix was flustered. He blinked at all the color in the normally subdued and sedate dining room. Bright-colored crepe paper festooned the walls, with *papier-mâché* birds and little burrows hanging at various places from the ceiling; also the item that Felix believed was called a piñata hung from the chandelier at the center of the room. Two pudgy Mexican men, mustachioed, wearing wide sombreros, black embroidered jackets and trousers with stripes up the sides, boots, and what Felix took to be toy revolvers in holsters around their waists, were singing a song that seemed to him to have a refrain line that sounded like "Wonton and Mayo." Miss Godkin, the hem of her lavish black gown sweeping across the floor, led Felix to his regular table.

"*Muchachos*," she said, "may I present Don Professor Arnstein?" And then, as Felix, still a bit stunned, fell into his chair, Miss Godkin, kicking up a large leg backwards, left, calling out "*Adiós*."

"What do ya mean, *want* to marry her?" Manzelman was saying, ending yet another of his jokes. "The old coot *had* to marry her."

Felix looked around the room. Many of the women, who

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seemed to have more enthusiasm for these evenings of Miss Godkin than the men, were got up in colorful clothes: peasant blouses, red and green scarves, long dangling earrings, flowers in their hair. But many of the men, committed no doubt to the idea of being good sports, went along, too, and wore bandannas around the loose skin of their necks; a few had turned up in large sombreros, which sat awkwardly on their bald heads or thinning grey hair. Looking around the room, Felix felt a stab of sadness for its occupants, once serious people whose usefulness was now considered exhausted and who were passing through their last years in this pitiful charade.

One of the two Mexican musicians now abandoned his guitar for a large drum, which he carried supported by a band around his neck; the other musician joined him with a trumpet. Miss Godkin, in the middle of the floor, encouraged everyone—"*Señores, Señoritas*"—to join her in something called "The Mexican Hat Dance." The music of the drum and the trumpet was very loud; a number of residents, most of them women, joined Miss Godkin on what was now the dance floor. The five men at the Manzelman table were unable to hear themselves talk, though Felix thought he saw the word *schtup* form on Feldstein's lips. Schindler, looking at Felix, nodded his head, pointing toward the door in a signal that he join him in avoiding all this racket. Felix rose from the table and did so.

The early autumn air was clear and cool. After the noise in the dining room, the relative silence of the streets seemed luxurious. The crepuscular light had a calming effect. Without either man saying a word about their destination, both turned at the corner and headed for the park along the lake. Felix was six or seven inches taller than Schindler. Odd, he felt, but he only seemed to think of this man as Schindler, never as Max, even though he had shared so many meals with him; even though he had read of his endless humiliations. But there was something about Schindler that resisted intimacy without encouraging formality.

At the park, they sat on a bench facing a small lagoon and the lake to the east of the lagoon. A jogger ran by, a heavyset man in orange pants and a charteuse sweat shirt, red in the face and listening to a radio through earphones. Then a couple, a young man and woman, wearing black spandex shorts, sped by on

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green-wheeled roller skates, their arms swinging vigorously. Four men in helmets and wearing colorful tops and shorts, also of spandex, cycled past. They looked to be in their fifties.

"Trying to evade death," said Schindler.

"A new American pastime, I believe," said Felix.

"Can't be done," said Schindler. "Still, you can't stop people from trying."

"I suppose not," said Felix.

"Tell me, Professor," said Schindler, "have you had a chance to read my book?"

"I have. It is very powerful, Mr. Schindler, very powerful indeed."

"Powerful is good?"

"Yes, powerful is good. Not that you can hope to publish such a manuscript. It would invite yet more lawsuits, as you must know. But then you must have known that when you wrote it."

"I didn't really write it with publishing it in mind," said Schindler. "I wrote it because I felt that I ought to say what I thought about the world before I left it. If someone read it, good. If not, not. Either way I guess it don't matter all that much. Still, I'm curious to know what you thought."

"They are dark, very dark, your thoughts about life, at least as you set them down in your book," Felix said. "Does life really seem so unremittingly bleak to you?"

"Only," said Schindler, a rare smile playing across his mouth, "when I think about it."

"What of acts of kindness?" Felix asked. "Or of self-sacrificing heroism, such as occur in war or even on the street? Do not such things lead you to believe that not all life is so dark?"

"I suppose I consider all such things exceptions that prove no rule, brief intermissions from a cruel comic show that always goes on. Life, Professor, is no picnic, as you may have noticed, but a stern test that everyone fails. That's how I at least have come to look at it."

"I am sure that you must have asked yourself why we are all put through this test and why it is prescribed in advance that all must fail."

Schindler ran his hand through his thin hair. "I think there may be a God or gods or some such being, who knows,

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Professor. But I also think that it or him or they don't give a damn. I think someone may be laughing at us. That we are all the butt of some big joke. A bigger joke than our friend Manzelman ever dreamed of. That, since you ask, is what I think."

"And what of a mother's love for her children? Of the kindness of people toward one another? Of charitable impulses? This means nothing, in your view?"

"But I haven't known any of that personally, you see. What I have known—actually experienced—is very different. Maybe, Professor, your own life has been easier than mine. You've never married. You have been a teacher all your life. I don't mean to be insulting, but maybe you've been better protected from the bitterness of the world than me."

As if by an impulse over which he had no control, Felix pushed up the sleeve of his suit jacket, unbuttoned his shirt cuff, and showed Schindler the tattooed number on his forearm.

"I underestimated you," said Schindler. "You have seen the devil."

"Perhaps I have," said Felix.

"How after the Nazis could you go on living?" asked Schindler.

"Perhaps because I like life," said Felix, "and am not unduly fond of the unknown alternative to it. Who knows, maybe each of us brings his own darkness into the world with him. Also his own light. I continue to see life as a gift. You, I gather from your book, see it otherwise."

"I am too old now to see it any other way," said Schindler. "I have encountered mostly fools. I have known too little kindness. I have drawn my conclusions."

Felix wished he could say something even mildly comforting. This conversation had gone deeper than he planned—or cared—for it to go. And now it had nowhere else to go.

Schindler rose from the bench. A slender, beautiful young woman in a purple sweat suit with a red headband encircling long blonde hair jogged by at a good pace. Run, young madame, Felix thought, let your mind linger on thoughts of love, on your own beauty, on all the delights of life. One day you, too, will know decrepitude. Your mind, too, will have little

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to think about but its own extinction. He rose from the bench as well. Wordlessly, the two old men, one tall, one short, shuffled slowly out of the park to return to the party in celebration of the people and culture of Mexico.

Felix did not go down to breakfast the next morning. Around ten o'clock the fire department's emergency vehicle, siren screaming, pulled up at the main entrance of Northwood. Felix heard it from his room, where, after reading that morning's newspaper, he was treating himself to a bit of Rilke's *Die Sonette an Orpheus*, which he loved. Nothing unusual about the siren. Some days the fire department vehicle pulled up at Northwood two or three times, to resuscitate someone with breathing trouble, or take a heart case off to the hospital, or remove the corpse of a resident who had expired during the night. It was at lunch that Felix learned that the fire department vehicle had come this time for the removal of another corpse, that of Max Schindler.

Schindler, Morry Manzelman explained, had taken his own life. He had made a hot bath, put himself in it, then opened the veins in his wrists and ankles. Or so Manzelman learned from the Puerto Rican maid who found Schindler's body when she came in to do his room earlier this morning. Manzelman reported that Schindler also left a $50 tip, with a note saying that it was for whoever had to clean up the mess he had left. He left no other message.

"A handsome gesture," said Manzelman. "The fifty-buck tip, I mean. You fellas know the joke about Mrs. Goldberg?" Manzelman continued. "Goes on a cruise as a slave where they imitate all the conditions of a Roman slave galley. They aren't out of port ten minutes, she asks the woman seated next to her, Mrs. Silverman, who has been on this cruise before, 'Tell me, Mrs. Silverman, when this cruise is over, how much do you tip the whipper?' "

"He died in the manner of Seneca," said Felix, aloud but to no one in particular, "a philosopher's death." And then, to himself, he thought, "Max, dear fellow, bon voyage, Godspeed, rest at last in peace."

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DAVID DOOLEY

Zoramel

The light through the chink in the curtains still woke him
after he'd slept with his best friend's girl.
He'd reach for a cigarette or head for the shower,
keeping the usual routine. Only once
did he start the morning with Scotch—
that, he could tell, was pretty useless.
When he didn't have classes he worked on his novel,
just notes so far about Zoramel, land of high mountains,
where the Piliashtili fled a century ago
when the usurper struck. They were highly evolved,
the Piliashtili, in matters of telepathy,
valuable for those who live on mountains.
He didn't much like her, that was how it started,
the way she was on-again, off-again, tore Roland apart.
Why couldn't she see that? She thought dinner was a good
idea,
the two who cared most for Roland should get to know each
other.
He told her about Zoramel as they walked up the ridge,
how the most sacred ritual was the ceremony of high waters.
The priests kept vigil when the waterfalls started to melt,
and everyone threw dried flowers into the gorge
so that the meadows would bloom again.
She insisted he include something funny in the book,
a forgetful magician or a freckled tomboy who swore.
He picked some chicory for her lapel;
Piliashtili kings dressed in chicory-blue.
The clairvoyant among them lived with the branching of
paths,
foreknowledge of possible futures. Glimpses, images,
a banquet hall by torchlight, a dungeon. A first-born son
who might share the taint of witch-blood. Not always knowing

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when the event would happen or whether the potion drunk,
the quest accepted, fulfilled or annihilated the vision.
They were the ones right for each other, he on top of her,
hands interlocked, he slowly licking her nipples,
Roland was much too old for her. He himself
was now Roland, touching with Roland's fingers,
sensing with Roland's nerves. Her brown eyes and oval face.
The white marks of her bikini straps, she was so small.
They were lovers, she was his destiny! Or they could be
casual lovers, clasping with more laughter than passion:
he gave himself to her, whatever she desired of him.
They had brought this moment into the world and could not
unmake it. Afterward she wept. Since he was the only one
there,
his responsibility was to hold her, stroke her hair,
murmur sounds. He was glad she was willing to stay the night,
though she crept to one side of the bed. He still
felt her against him whenever he tried to turn over.
What the book needed was plot. The young prince
could restore the fortunes of the Piliashtili,
that was almost a given, and would probably fall in love.
He hadn't worked out how it would happen. Maybe the villains
could be shape stealers frightened of the sun.
The prince would journey through Zoramel, with or without
a magician. Roland was no help, he didn't like fantasy novels,
and he was obsessed with her, he thought she'd been
unfaithful.
He could scarcely teach, let alone work on his thesis.
She hadn't told Roland. But wouldn't she?
Would she be able not to? He found himself telling Roland
about Memnor, Isle of the Glassy Lake, where stood a sacred
grove,
and whatsoever was done in that grove, even murder,
was instantly annulled after the deed. The victim
you hacked to pieces stood up and walked out with you.
The prince was under strict instructions not to enter that
wood.
The Scotch was making Roland look tearful. If Roland cried,
he would be forced to comfort him.

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The Waiter

For the last time he put on the frilled white shirt,
the black pants, tied on the apron with deep pockets.
He gathered the slick white menus and greeted
the early arrivals. He smiled the accustomed smile
as he took the drink orders, suggested the blackened redfish,
and ground fresh pepper on the Boston lettuce.
An older couple exclaimed at the scalloped butter rosettes.
In the past he had made up stories about the people he
served,
the young husband who wouldn't look at his wife,
afraid to reveal so much love, the woman who ate alone,
reading Agatha Christie. He had learned
to maintain a proper retreat; that was more loving.
All he wanted tonight was to freshen the iced teas,
to talk about bread pudding and Kahlua cheesecake.
When he moved his lumbering frame back to the kitchen,
placing the orders for chicken with artichoke hearts,
none of the others lingered to speak, Bill with another story
about the new baby, or Ron, not high tonight, who'd said
he looked like a big teddy bear and put his hands on him.
Just as well get used to the discomfort others would feel,
how the monk's gown would mean he was not the same,
himself not a body like other bodies, the self withering in
prayer.
As in work. The woman in the green dress had changed her
mind
and wanted dessert. Certainly. More of his tables filling up,
tonight would be hectic. Then sometime after eleven
he would pull the door shut behind him, perhaps with
no more than the usual goodbyes, and begin his journey
to a room with white walls and a hard bed
where he could be nothing and God could be always.

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Beauty

Incarnated beauty. Yes he did. Briefly.
Worked at it. Had to. Hours at the gym
extending the legs. Forcing weighted arms back.
Years of being *Shorty*. And glasses: *Four-Eyes*.
Favored by the nuns. He knew how to obey.
After college, allowing himself to learn
what he liked. Better, learning what
others liked. Figuring how to provide it.
Packaging the goods in shorts and muscle shirts.
Beauty. Beauty is of steel. Lacks discernible weakness.
Even in the games which led to being tied up.
Light beatings. Incorporating pain.
Finding at last someone he belonged with.
Couplehood. Teddy bears on the shower curtain.
And being abandoned. Not the one who chose.
The carapace must be thickened. Prickly remarks.
More sessions at the gym. Swimsuits skimpier.
Reluctance to get tested. Assuming the worst
about everyone. Night sweats. Diarrhea.
The worst proving to be true. No one
need know. Plenty of rest before and after
he made an appearance. Days in the hospital
a secret. They'd see him when he was himself.
Wouldn't notice the lesions. Then suddenly
worse. Shingles on his feet so bad
he could hardly walk. Oxygen tanks.
Let them come if they wanted to come.
As they did. Held his hand. Faithful.
Always there then? Invisibly holding him up?
His riding on it unknowing. Still there
for him to lean back on his pillows. Buoyant.

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DAVID MASON

Milton's Fame in Heaven

> What use, Milton, a silly story
> Of our lost general parents,
> eaters of fruit?
> —Gary Snyder

In his posthumously-published short story, "Wash Far Away," John Berryman described a professor attempting the impossible—to make his students fall in love with "Lycidas":

> . . . he saw the boys would find it formidable, egotistical, frozen, their hatred of Milton developed to a fine pitch in the schools. A burden fell on him—that unpleasant majesty, cold grandeur of Milton.

The professor grieves for his dead wife and seeks solace where his students can see only an antiquated decorum. In our time we have become used to art that is scaled to our prosaic expectations; the distance between us and a poet of Milton's loftiness can seem very great indeed. Milton challenges our notions of what is genuine or real in art. Despite his prescient arguments about divorce, censorship and government, his severe religious convictions seem, at a glance, far from the realities of our troubled *fin de siècle*. We forget that his era of civil war, regicide, long and short parliaments, Muggletonians and Chiliasts, was every bit as divisive as ours. In his time, just as in ours, readers avoided what they feared they might disagree with; early printings of *Paradise Lost* sold slowly. But one of the paradoxes of poetry, perhaps of all reading, is that we may enjoy works with which we disagree. I suspect that some of us feel this way about Milton.

The greatest epic poet in the English language, he has usually been more admired than loved. Eliot noted that "The champions of Milton in our time . . . have been scholars and teachers"—truer now than it has ever been. Shakespeare is never remote from our stage and even our cinema, but does anyone

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outside of a classroom read Milton anymore? How can the sons and daughters of the "me" decades respond to a poet who sought fame in heaven? How can students who don't remember the dates of the American Civil War, let alone the English one, comprehend poems laden with more obscure allusions than a pop star has sequins? How can those of us raised in more or less atheistic homes, who never cracked a Bible until required to do so in a college literature course, find sustenance in the poetry of a dead white male for whom nothing—*nothing*—was knowable outside its religious context? It seems that Milton is doomed to distant admiration from fewer and fewer readers, his reputation guarded by scholars, many of whom write only for specialists. I would like to try, however, like Berryman's professor, to reassert Milton's value to amateurs like myself, and to discuss recent books by two scholars, John T. Shawcross and William M. Porter, that are helpful precisely because they attempt to make the life and poetry clearer for readers in our time.

One myth about Milton that must be dispelled is that he is humorless. The more I read of him, the more it seems that he was, in both poetry and prose, extremely playful. Eliot once called Milton's verse "a solemn game," but the game is not always somber. Critics have often said that *Il Penseroso* is truer to Milton's personality than his *L'Allegro*, partly because the former is longer and more convincing. But Milton gave us both poems, enjoyable as student exercises of a double-sided wit. His more satirical poems are particularly good when he is angry—playfully angry, it may be said, as in his 12th sonnet:

> I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs
> By the known rules of ancient liberty,
> When straight a barbarous noise environs me
> Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs. . . .

You can see a similar delightful haughtiness in his treatise *Of Education*:

> I shall detain you no longer in the demonstration of what we should not do, but straight conduct you to a hillside, where I will

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> point you out the right path of a virtuous and noble education; laborious indeed at the first ascent, but else so smooth, so green, so full of goodly prospect and melodious sounds on every side, that the harp of Orpheus was not more charming. I doubt not but ye shall have more ado to drive our dullest and laziest youth, our stocks and stubs, from the infinite desire of such a happy nurture, than we have now to hale and drag our choicest and hopefullest wits to that asinine feast of sow-thistles and brambles which is commonly set before them as all the food and entertainment of their tenderest and most docible age.

To readers for whom the diet of contemporary education frequently seems all "sow-thistles and brambles" that passage has its attractions. And all this is to say nothing of the comic detail he lavished on Sin and Death, Satan's incestuous family, in *Paradise Lost*. Though he never performed for the groundlings as Shakespeare did, much of his work is infused with a wit that derives from profound love of language.

Even when his purpose is serious, Milton's formal experiments are as playful as a jazz musician's. I once teased a Milton scholar by calling her subject the first jazz poet—a silly comparison, I know, but both classical and jazz improvisations build upon preexisting forms, just as Milton's do. English-language poets who want to learn their trade, especially enjambment, the tension of line and sentence so vital to blank and free verse, ignore Milton at their peril. The Latinate elaboration of syntax and the shifting of the caesura make Milton, as Eliot noted, a "master in our language of freedom within form." It is precisely that freedom which Samuel Johnson attacked in "Lycidas": ". . . the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing." But "Lycidas" is a great example of the auditory imagination, of "freedom within form." I may tire of its pastoral trappings from time to time, I may even disagree with its theology, but I cannot agree with Johnson that its passion is inauthentic or its construction formless. Milton probably lost little sleep over the death of Edward King which occasioned the poem, but he used the opportunity to formulate new purposes for poetry:

> Alas, what boots it with uncessant care
> To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade,
> And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?

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Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days;
But the fair guerdon where we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with th' abhorrèd shears,
And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"
Phoebus replied, and touched my trembling ears:
"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistering foil
Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumor lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in heav'n expect thy meed."

A great deal can be said about this passage, which establishes the poet's new *raison d'être.* In terms of both sound and meaning, the crux comes in the thirteenth quoted line, where the poet has worked himself into a passionate frustration about ambition and a life cut short, and is suddenly interrupted mid-line by a pagan god beginning to hint of a Christian resolution, a link between the ancient, apparently polytheistic practice of poetry and the devotion to Christ who will bring about redemption. That mid-line shift in emotion and idea is typical of Milton's practice.

For another example of this kind of surprise, look at how the verse soars and falters when Eve describes her dream of tasting the forbidden fruit in Book V of *Paradise Lost*:

. . . the pleasant savory smell
So quickened appetite that I, methought,
Could not but taste. Forthwith up to the clouds
With him I flew, and underneath beheld
The earth outstretched immense, a prospect wide
And various. Wond'ring at my flight and change
To this high exaltation, suddenly

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> My guide was gone, and I, methought, sunk down,
> And fell asleep. . . .

When I read an epic poem my attention waxes and wanes as much as the next person's, but when Milton takes off like this he astonishes me. Here is poetry of sincerest technique, so rich that it frequently beggars criticism. There are exotic lines like this one from Book IX: "So glozed the Tempter, and his proem tuned. . . ." There are descriptive passages that would excite Steven Spielberg, like those in Book I where Satan addresses his troops:

> He spake; and to confirm his words, out flew
> Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs
> Of mighty Cherubim; the sudden blaze
> Far round illumined hell. Highly they raged
> Against the Highest, and fierce with graspèd arms
> Clashed on their sounding shields the din of war,
> Hurling defiance toward the vault of heav'n.

There is even a description at the end of Book III of earth seen from space, as it were, centuries before the name Apollo referred to rockets. In short, when Milton promises "Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme," he delivers.

Dryden thought that blank verse "renders the Poet too Luxuriant," and some of *Paradise Lost* does seem overblown. For example, the author of Genesis relates the Covenant of the Rainbow after Noah's flood with a moving simplicity that Milton's version in Book XI misses. And long sentences like the one in Book III comparing Satan to a vulture may be unnecessarily complex, though one can still derive pleasure from watching Milton test the limits of his art. He never stopped experimenting, right up to the radically varied verse of *Samson Agonistes*.

For many readers, the problem is that such technical virtuosity cannot be entirely divorced from Milton's religious ideals. He may very well be famous in heaven, but where does that leave those of us, poor earthbound creatures, who are less decisive in our religious beliefs? Surely one of the great achievements of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* is their

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synthesis of the Old and New Testaments, but I must honestly confess my inability to believe in their ideas except as baroque parables. If *Paradise Lost* had surfaced in a less individualistic culture, it might have taken on the meaning of a sacred text like the Bhagavad-Gita, and Milton the amorphous stature of Vyasa, the composer of the Mahabharata. But because of the period in which he wrote we happen to know a great deal about Milton, who never denies his individuality as a man and poet. *Paradise Lost* is not a sacred text; it is a poem by a human being attempting to interpret sacredness in his own way—and, not least, to tell a story. Milton believes in the path out of his "subjected plain," but the purpose of his epic is largely to explain our arrival in this fallen state. The very existence of literature is an aspect of our fallenness. Religious poetry usually arises from the pain of our separation from God; we would have no need of poems in Eden.

From early on, Milton audaciously assumes a prophetic role, as we can see in his Sixth Latin Elegy (translated by Shawcross): "For truly the poet is sacred to the gods, and priest of the gods, / And his hidden heart and lips breathe Jove." Poetry that takes language to its highest levels is the human endeavor closest to divine purpose; Milton uses the pagans like Hesiod, Homer and Vergil, but recasts them in Christian terms. He claims the identity and worth of Adam, fallen but still capable of choosing freedom, as he asserts in the final lines of *Paradise Lost*:

> The world was all before them, where to choose
> Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
> They hand in hand, with wand'ring steps and slow,
> Through Eden took their solitary way.

Those "wand'ring steps" are ours, too. Even if we lack Milton's faith, we can understand his explanation of the difficult world—a world, as Yeats said, more full of weeping than we can understand. When in Book XI the archangel Michael gives Adam a vision of the future, full of disease and war, it seems sadly like Milton's present, and ours.

Samuel Johnson complained that Milton belonged to no church, and locating just where Milton's religious affiliations lay

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has long been a problem for students of his work. Here, books like Shawcross' *John Milton: The Self and the World* prove helpful guides.[1] Professor Shawcross is the editor of *Milton: The Critical Heritage,* and the author of several other books, including a 1991 study arguing that we can once again believe in the existence of authors and their intentions (what a relief!). In the new work he portrays a poet increasingly devoted to individual freedom. He notes Milton's "rejection of intermediaries between the individual and the godhead," following the declaration in "The New Forcers of Conscience" that "New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large." Where Dr. Johnson found Milton's disaffiliation "dangerous," Shawcross finds it liberating. Milton was a rebel—not like Satan against God, but against those human institutions which circumscribed religious freedom, so it was all the more ironic when he found himself working for a tyrant in Cromwell's Protectorate.

Dryly labeling his project "a different biography," Professor Shawcross discusses key aspects of Milton's psychology: his sexuality, attitudes toward women, religious beliefs and struggle to break free of parental influences. Without attempting to compete with standard biographies, like William Riley Parker's extremely sympathetic 1968 study, Shawcross essays new explanations of issues that have hitherto been left fairly hazy. Some of them will remain so, I'm afraid. This book's occasional use of Jungian psychology seems speculative at best, and at times Shawcross burdens his prose with ugly jargon:

> The devouring uroborous, a female archetype, takes on a regressive symbol (the snake eating its tail), and such regression in the male has a psychic castrating effect, killing feminine relatedness.

I'll spare you the rest of it. Passages like this do little but lose the reader in fruitless speculations. Shawcross expends too much energy proving in Jungian terms that Milton could not be free as an artist (specifically, free to make his fifteen-month pilgrimage to the Continent) until his mother died; Dr. Johnson long

[1] JOHN MILTON: The Self and the World, by *John T. Shawcross*. University Press of Kentucky. $35.00.

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ago made that point with far greater ease: ". . . the death of his mother set him at liberty to travel. . . ."

In the chapter called "The Lady of Christ's" (Milton's nickname at Cambridge) Shawcross argues that Milton experienced a homosexual infatuation for his friend Charles Diodati. Well, maybe he did and maybe he didn't; Shawcross can't prove that it was anything more than the English schoolboy thing, and anyway, it's hard to care much whether Milton was buggered in his youth. The payoff for this investigation seems exceedingly slim.

A smaller problem with this study arises precisely from Shawcross' real erudition. His proofs that Milton had begun to compose his longer poems much earlier than some of us suspected (revising the myth of the blind poet dictating all of the later works to his daughters) are so dense with statistics of manuscript dating that only specialists will care to read them closely. These faults give the book an uneven quality, but they comprise a small portion of its otherwise useful pages.

Shawcross eschews a linear presentation of the life and thought, deliberately circling back over key events for a second or third look. Perhaps this exemplifies scholarly humility, a conviction that the real John Milton will never quite be captured in the critical biographer's net. But certain passages take on a passionate clarity, such as his defense of Milton against the charge of misogyny, levelled by critics like Sandra Gilbert. It is an attack at least partly initiated by Samuel Johnson:

> [Milton's] family consisted of women; and there appears in his books something like a Turkish contempt for females, as subordinate and inferior beings. That his own daughters might not break the ranks, he suffered them to be depressed by a mean and penurious education. He thought woman made only for obedience, and man only for rebellion.

In *Paradise Lost* alone one can find plenty of passages that would seem to support these critics, Adam made "for God only," Eve "for God in him," etc. Eve's gentle narcissism and susceptibility to Satan are all used as evidence. But such arguments neglect the fact that even the archangel Uriel is flattered and deceived by Satan in Book III. Satan's evil is quite insidiously successful; it must be, in order to bring both Adam and Eve to a chosen

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covenant with God. Not only is Eve duped into error, but Adam chooses his disobedience knowingly, and then, as in Genesis, blames it all on his mate. While I would never deny the patriarchal burden of both the Bible and Milton's poetry, or attempt to make the poet a "sensitive" contemporary, I do think Milton goes out of his way to prove both man and woman complicit in the human dilemma.

Shawcross is good at showing us how Milton shared his epoch's hierarchical view of the sexes, but he rightly distinguishes that view from misogyny. Milton celebrates the union of male and female in marriage as "chaste" sexuality (see the hymn to married love in Book IV). Perceptions of the sexual act as something foul or problematic occur only after the fall, as symptoms of our wretched new condition. Adam rails against women only in his fallen state:

> O why did God,
> Creator wise, that peopled highest heav'n
> With Spirits masculine, create at last
> This novelty on earth, this fair defect
> Of Nature, and not fill the world at once
> With men as angels without feminine,
> Or find some other way to generate
> Mankind?

This is the cry of a despairing man, a fallen one. When in Book VIII he recalls first meeting Eve, he ecstatically praises her knowledge unlike his own.

There are many reasons why the charge of misogyny is ludicrous (among the critics who have pointed this out is Joseph Summers in his 1962 book *The Muse's Method*). William Riley Parker's especially fine chapters on Milton's difficult first marriage tell us that the poet enjoyed friendships with several witty and knowledgeable women. Shawcross points out that, contrary to Johnson's belief, two of the poet's three daughters were unusually well educated for the time (the third was retarded). He doesn't call this sexual equality, but he persuades me that it's a far cry from the hatred of women. Shawcross also argues that Adam and Eve provide the universal and necessary union of male and female principles, "which two great sexes animate the

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world. . . ." Satan seems to envy their partnership, and God is allied with union.

Sexual politics is only one of several issues that have presented difficulties to readers of Milton. He sets high standards for human conduct, desiring in one of his treatises "to tell the very soil itself, what her perverse inhabitants are deaf to," and such idealism is troubling to our ways of thinking. This is why we so often mistake Satan for the hero of *Paradise Lost.* At times Satan's vitality sounds almost like that of Tennyson's Ulysses: "All is not lost; the unconquerable will, / And study of revenge, immortal hate, / And courage never to submit or yield. . . ." But this defiance only appears attractive until you notice that Satan's motives are hate and revenge. His suffering, the hell in himself, is deeply sympathetic to our psychoanalytical age, but we would be foolish, as Shawcross reminds us, not to distinguish it from heroism. Shawcross' Milton is a man who has taken command of his destiny, and this scholarly study is at its best when the biographer displays his subject in a simple narrative form.

The scope of William M. Porter's new book is more limited, but the book is to my mind more completely successful.[2] Because of its clarity, its easy erudition and the usefulness of its thesis, Porter's book deserves the status amateurs and specialists have accorded previous books like F.T. Prince's *The Italian Element in Milton's Verse* (1954). Porter, a professor of classical languages at the University of Houston, calls himself "an amateur Miltonist." Neither a Miltonist nor a classical scholar myself, I would hesitate to comment on his book if it weren't so enjoyably readable.

Like scores of other Milton critics, Professor Shawcross notes Milton's "technique of quotation and allusion," which has made his work such a gold mine for annotators. Professor Porter, on the other hand, opens what is for me a welcome airshaft in the mine by suggesting that much of this commentary may be misplaced: "The situation soon becomes depressingly Alexandrian: commentary begets and then becomes dependent upon

[2] READING THE CLASSICS AND *PARADISE LOST*, by *William M. Porter.* University of Nebraska Press. $30.00.

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metacommentary, so that we lose almost completely the sense of direct contact with a poetic original." How refreshing this is! For many of us, Milton's poetry has become so encrusted with annotation and calcified debate that we've lost all sense of it as poetry. Porter focuses on parallels between *Paradise Lost* and classical authors, principally Hesiod, Homer, Horace and Vergil. His main point is that not all classical "echoes" or "borrowings" in Milton's poem are in fact allusions. Some have been called allusions due to faulty translations of the classics or the misguided eagerness of scholars. Porter says that an important allusion is "a miniature hermeneutic dialogue" between the classical and the "modern" texts, and offers ways of testing the value of such allusions:

> I would propose, as a rule of thumb, that if a point of association seems to serve as the locus for a much wider complex of significant correspondences between the texts, then it may be an allusion. But it is precisely because the true allusion initiates such a variety of comparisons that, if the author is to avoid appearing purely imitative, it must contain an element of contrast as well as comparison. This is what I call the *critical allusion.*

Thus, some lines of Satan in Book I allude to Achilles in the underworld (*Odyssey*, Book XI), but with a twist; where Achilles had said he would rather live a slave than rule the dead, Satan declares, "Better to reign in hell, than serve in heaven." In a chapter called "Design," Porter makes fascinating comparisons between *Paradise Lost* and Vergil's *Aeneid.* One might think the allusive patterns would pair Adam with Aeneas, Eve with Dido, but Porter reveals a kind of sexual chiasmus in the design: "In Milton's own terms, it appears that the classical hero could have successfully passed the test that the Biblical hero failed so spectacularly. By linking Adam with Dido, who was truly guilty of impiety, Milton stresses Adam's transgression and failure."

Porter disputes "the claim that Milton one way or another vanquished the classical tradition." For him the classics are like a fine old building, Milton the newer addition through which one must enter to discover ancient splendor. In a wonderful chapter devoted to Milton's language he writes,

> An eighteenth-century reader educated in the classics would have treated Milton's text as a kind of linguistic palimpsest: the reader

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> would be constantly aware of a dimension of classical syntax and diction just beneath the English itself. What is odd, however, is that the top level is referring to the level that it overlays. . . . He writes English that is constantly pointing beyond itself to something else, or perhaps I should say that it is *playing against* something that does not appear to be there, like Marcel Marceau leaning on a wall that is invisible, but solidly suggested by his pantomime.

This is a brilliant book. By seeing Milton's allusions as "a species of wit," Porter has removed some critical encrustation from a poetic jewel.

Both of these scholars want, first and foremost, to contribute to our understanding of Milton without losing him in the "sow-thistles and brambles" of theory. Both begin with the assumption that he is worth reading on his own merits and needn't be melted down and poured into some new ideological mold. Both display humility without being overawed; they bring Milton closer to us and, in a sense, justify his eccentric ways. I doubt that one could ever make a case for a popular Milton; his reaching after perfection stands as an example of individual imagination carried to its utmost. But perhaps it is an example our prosaic world still needs. We are, as he suggested, both afflicted and blessed. He leaves us acutely aware of our own "wand'ring steps" in a world suspended between a heaven and a hell. He was a monumental poet who seems always to have known his own importance, but also that there was something vaster and more enduring than mere poetry.

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MICHAEL McFEE

To a Muse

You look like an old-fashioned microphone,
your mesh stained with the breath

of several thousand cups of tea
since my wife found you at Woolie's in Cambridge

years ago. Midmorning or midafternoon,
whenever I feel inspiration flagging, I reach

for you, hook you to a mug, ease a teaspoonful
of Twinings into your basket,

English, Irish, Prince of Wales, Ceylon, Souchong,
politics are a meaningless brew,

and wait for the perfect steep
as I wait for a phrase, lifting you from the water

at just the right ripeness. O Astex Strainer,
you are a homely muse

with your melted handle and second-degree burns,
with the caffeine-taint I could try

to scratch from your stiff lip
but don't, knowing that it corresponds somehow

to the taint my teeth and mug
have taken from you, your lasting tannic kiss.

And when my boiling invocations finally exhaust
your patience, I will retire you

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to a place of honor on my desk
where I can lift you to my face when lost in thought

like a mask whose subtle fumes
help the body remember what the mind keeps forgetting.

MARK JARMAN

In Via Est Cisterna

All she remembers from her Latin class
Is a phrase she echoes for her granddaughter.
Lately I hear in everything she says
A depth that she covers up with laughter.
In the road is a well. But in her mind
It fills with blanks, like a shaft of sand and pebbles.
A well is in the road. It is profound,
I'm sure, it is a phrase with many levels.
And then, I see one: the woman with five husbands
Met Jesus there. But my mother had only one—
Unless now having lost him she understands
That he was never who she thought, but someone
Who was different men with different women through the years.
In the road is a well. It fills with tears.

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DEAN FLOWER

Desegregating the Syllabus

"Actively we have woven ourselves with the very warp and woof of this nation," said W. E. B. Du Bois in 1903, but nobody much listened. D. H. Lawrence found no black writers on his reading list for *Studies in Classic American Literature* in 1923, and his notion of "classic" is still with us. The Harlem Renaissance came and went, but the syllabus stayed white. Dreiser was realism, Faulkner was gothic sound and fury signifying nothing, and Zora Neale Hurston did not exist. In 1940 Richard Wright's *Native Son* drove a wedge into the solid block of white indifference to black writers. Race became an acceptable issue when Faulkner wrote *Intruder in the Dust* in 1948 and won the Nobel Prize in 1950. By the mid-1950s the essays of James Baldwin were helping to shape the Civil Rights movement. By 1964 Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* which had appeared in 1952, was cited more frequently than any other novel in a *Book Week* poll of critics, who were asked to name the most important fiction of the postwar era. Professors concerned with contemporary literature or culture added black writers to their syllabi. Anthologies of black literature proliferated; courses sprang up, and soon whole programs and departments came into being. Proudly, I might add. "Black power" was in the air, and slogans like "Black is beautiful" seemed to strike a positive note.

But the salient fact in all this apparent progress was that the definition of "American" literature did not change. In the college classroom American literature was, and still mainly is, defined by so-called "classic" texts and "major figures"—as if black writers had really made no difference in our literary history until, say, *Native Son.* Look in any publisher's college catalogue. The canonized (white) writers, who represent "the American tradition," are listed in one place, the African Americans appear in another. Students take courses in "Afro-

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American" writers or "Black Studies," almost always taught by persons of color, and they take courses in American literature, almost always taught by white persons in departments of English. The segregation could not be more emphatic. We have a system which says that Thoreau's personal narratives are essential to the American tradition, but Frederick Douglass' are not. Or which says that Mark Twain's vernacular is authentically American and important, but Charles Chesnutt's is black and marginal. Or which says that Faulkner's novels are required reading, but James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* or Jean Toomer's *Cane* will be studied, if at all, in a separate category.

Yet the truth is that black writers are woven in the very warp and woof of American literature, as they have been in American life, just as Du Bois said in 1903. To think otherwise is a pernicious mistake. Toni Morrison's influential essay, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," in *The Michigan Quarterly Review* (Winter, 1989) and her recent lectures at Harvard, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, are only the latest in a series of warnings on the subject stretching back through *Absalom, Absalom!* and *The Souls of Black Folk* to Melville's *Benito Cereno* and John Woolman's *Journal*. Fortunately there are now signs of change, in the academic world at least. Two books of literary history have recently appeared, both by white writers, both arguing the fundamental interdependence of black and white literature in nineteenth century America.[1] Both books exhort us to desegregate our preconceptions as well as our syllabi. Both show how black culture and history and individual voices are embedded in white texts. Both attest to the systematic misunderstanding and denigration of black literature over the last two hundred years, the result of a pervasive failure to hear what the minority was really saying. Eric Sundquist's is a large-scale study of black history and culture traced through selected texts of black and white writers, beginning with Nat Turner's "Confessions" in 1831 and ending with the pan-

[1] TO WAKE THE NATIONS: Race in the Making of American Literature, by *Eric J. Sundquist*. Belknap/Harvard University Press. $29.95.
WAS HUCK BLACK?: Mark Twain and African American Voices, by *Shelley Fisher Fishkin*. Oxford University Press. $25.00.

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Africanism of Du Bois's novel *Darkwater* in 1920. Shelley Fisher Fishkin's briefer study is focused on Mark Twain's knowledge of blacks, and how his sympathy and curiosity influenced the creation of Huck Finn's colloquial style, eventually to affect Twain's innumerable descendants, both black and white. In short both books discern what Sundquist calls a "complex dialectic between 'white' and 'black' culture" the very existence of which has been heretofore denied or ignored.

Sundquist's first project is to show how the slave revolt in San Domingo in 1799 and the Napoleonic grandeur of its leader, Toussaint L'Ouverture, hovered uneasily in the minds of Americans both pro- and anti-slavery, a symbol of what might happen if the slaves were to claim the same "Rights of Man" upon which the American Revolution was based. In this context Nat Turner's bloody rebellion in 1831 and his purported "Confessions" (actually written by Thomas Gray, a white journalist) become not evidence of his psychopathic fanaticism but, indirectly, a messianic assertion of revolutionary principle. Sundquist reads the "Confessions" as a quasi-conspiracy between Gray, who attempts in his preface to pass off Turner's behavior as "religious madness," and Turner, who remains in subtle control, dictating his unrepentant confessions without actually writing a word. The situation is a paradigm, Sundquist argues, of the master-slave relation, richly expressive of the black man's paradoxical freedom and power.

Sundquist's readings of subsequent texts—Frederick Douglass' *My Bondage and My Freedom*, Martin Delaney's *Blake, or The Huts of America*—follow similar historicist lines, emphasizing the continuing apocalyptic threat of what Harriet Beecher Stowe called the "San Domingo hour," and elucidating the black writer's canniness, despite constraints, in signalling (and signifying) his protest. But the most powerful and complex analysis of slavery, and the literature of slavery, takes place in Sundquist's extended discussion of *Benito Cereno* (1855). He reads it as the prediction of "an explosive heightening of the conflict between American democracy, Old World despotism, and Caribbean New World revolution." Amasa Delano, that paragon of impercipient narrators, is guilty of such "racialism" and "manic benevolence" as to "empty him of moral authority":

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> Delano's offensive stereotypes allow us to see that the trope of African American docility and gaiety was generated as much by sympathetic liberalism as by the harsh regime of slavery. Minstrelsy—in effect, the complete show of the tale's action staged for Delano—is a product, as it were, of his mind, of his willingness to accept Babo's Sambo-like performance.

Cereno himself, Sundquist argues, represents the power of Spain and Catholicism in New World slavery (Spain "reinvented Negro slavery" in San Domingo, according to Theodore Parker), but Cereno's authority aboard the *San Dominick* is gone:

> an impotent master painfully supported by the constant "half embrace of his servant," [Cereno] virtually *is* the Spanish New World, undermined by slave and nationalist revolutions and adrift aboard a deteriorated ghost ship on the revolutionary waters of history . . .

Babo, of course, epitomizes the threat of slave revolt, the fear of another Toussaint or Turner. But Sundquist sees his essential role as the counter-assertion of an African point of view: it is Babo who exposes the fraudulence of the ship's figurehead and re-writes its meaning:

> When the skeleton is exposed in the place of Cristobal Colon's image, it is the Columbian myth itself—the entire story of New World history told from the European American point of view—that is stripped down to the rudiments of its own carnage: the master becomes the sacrificial emblem of his own vicious system of power.

Nowhere in *To Wake the Nations* is Sundquist more resourceful in re-constructing the African text within a white one than he is here. Nowhere is he more eloquent or more lucid.[2] His chapter on the shaving scene, "The Play of the Barber," is a virtual parable of the black writer's capacity to manipulate, masquerade, and control. Babo's artistry is shown to be superb: disciplined, resourceful, ironic, and above all subtle. As Sundquist shows, Babo's ultimate dignity is expressed, after the retaliatory massacre, in his silence. Melville identifies with that. What he

[2] In fact most of this material appeared earlier in his essay *"Benito Cereno* and New World Slavery" in *Reconstructing American Literary History*, ed. by Sacvan Bercovitch (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), pp. 93–122.

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respects most is "that hive of subtlety," the brain of the black man. This constitutes not just a transformative reading of *Benito Cereno* alone but a demonstration of how to read, or re-read, the racial meanings in any number of American texts. For a small example of the sort of discovery Sundquist makes possible, listen for a moment to the last stanza of Emily Dickinson's "As the Starved Maelstrom laps the Navies" (#872):

> I of a finer Famine
> Deem my Supper dry
> But for a Berry of Domingo
> And a Torrid Eye.

I used to think that metonymic berry stood for an exotic or romantic realm, and that Dickinson's taste for it was intensified by having just a sip. But it is clear now that Domingo represents for her the realm of black slaves overthrowing their oppressors. That she thirsts for just one intense berry of it—the fruit of that bloody vengeance in 1799—tells us how torrid Dickinson's eye really was.

The latter two-thirds of *To Wake the Nations* concentrates on the dismal Reconstruction era, the institution of Jim Crow laws and the increasingly virulent racism that emerged in the 1890s. A mythology of the New South appeared, sentimentalizing the "darky" and the old plantation, making a mockery of the Emancipation and the causes of the Civil War. Nobody recognized this better, Sundquist demonstrates, than Mark Twain and Charles Chesnutt. He shows that *Huckleberry Finn*'s problematic final chapters, all about "setting a free nigger free," reflect only too well the moral failures of the nation in 1885. But *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1896) provides an even grimmer reflection of a society actively legislating racism. At the climax of the novel when Tom Driscoll in blackface kills his mother in an attempt to conceal his miscegenation, he becomes "the specter of black crime and contamination—the Negro as mongrel or 'beast,' " Sundquist argues, even though Tom is "like a minstrel performer masquerading in the disguise that parodies his hidden slave status." Ludicrously involuted as these roles seem to be, they reflect the insane masquerades of a society intent upon making racial fictions into "natural" facts. Although Sund-

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quist does not say so, Tom Driscoll emerges as the prototype of a much later victim of miscegenational fictions, equally a "Negro mongrel" and murderer, Faulkner's Joe Christmas.

Not until he begins discussion of Charles Chesnutt does Sundquist venture to explain two of the most fundamental elements of African American writing: signifying and minstrelsy. Signifying, as readers of Henry Louis Gates already know, is the favorite rhetorical strategy of evasion and substitution whereby a covert message is sent in the guise of innocuous or nonsensical metaphors. Its essence is verbal masquerade, a readiness to improvise meaning on another frequency than that of conventional English. Signifying allows the black speaker an expressive freedom, a discourse of his own, a way of deriding the white linguistic realm. Black minstrelsy, as Sundquist explains it, may have originated in the songs and dances that slaves were forced to perform "as a species of entertainment or humiliation," but "satire of the masters was never far from the surface." They came to be called "songs of allusion" or "songs of derision" or "signifying songs," and performances were rounded off by the "cakewalk," a grand-finale promenade which began in burlesque of genteel white dancing and went on, in Ralph Ellison's words, "to force the steps into a choreography uniquely their own." Whites were amused to see themselves so incongruously imitated, says Ellison, "blissfully unaware" of the mockery and the metamorphosis going on.

Yet were they so unaware? White minstrelsy, or the minstrel show (now of infamous repute), sprang up almost immediately. Its racist emphasis, its use as white supremacist propaganda, is undeniable. "White minstrels (and sometimes black) [Sundquist adds ruefully] put on grotesque makeup and outlandish clothing in order to caricature black life; even . . . purportedly more affectionate representations were likely to result in the same humiliations." Both Sundquist and Fishkin lament that even Mark Twain enjoyed and participated in these degrading spectacles. Neither of them considers why—beyond simple racism—Twain might have been so fascinated or what the more complex cultural implications of white minstrelsy might be. Whites eager to don blackface were surely crossing the color line while pretending not to. At some level they must have

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recognized the satire of themselves and wanted to join in the fun, to participate in the black parody of whites. Beyond any doubt whites were fascinated by the new dances (the cakewalk "became a white dance craze," Sundquist tells us), wanted to sing the extraordinary music (work songs, spirituals), and—like Twain—wanted to use their expressive vernacular comedy. What better means than masking, and extravagant burlesque, to conceal the ambiguity and ambivalence of such imitative desires?

But Sundquist is right to emphasize that minstrelsy could be "a complex trap" for both white and black writers. His reading of Chesnutt's whole career emphasizes his ambivalence about color (he could pass for white) and class (he was Northern and formally educated, a lawyer). Yet he chose to write dialect stories, drew upon minstrelsy and signifying and the lore of African "conjure." What makes Chesnutt so interesting to Sundquist is the way he managed to embrace cultural and political contradictions. He danced an elaborate cakewalk, says Sundquist, in which "was written the entire history of nineteenth-century African American life." Unfortunately this large claim is rather tediously and half-convincingly worked out. Signifying and minstrelsy are never really analyzed; the cakewalk is a metaphor, not what Chesnutt literally does; the *idea* of conjure is more interesting than Chesnutt's actual use of it.

The same tends to be true of Sundquist's long discussion of W. E. B. Du Bois. The best material here is about spirituals or "the sorrow songs." He demonstrates how Du Bois used "this wonderful music of bondage" to structure *The Souls of Black Folk*. Like Chesnutt using dialect and conjure, Du Bois was richly aware of the signifying potential of this music, and Sundquist is able to point out its many (and subtle) "African retentions." But again he remains at a distance from Du Bois's texts. The *ideas* about what Du Bois does with the music (his "reappropriation" of the music, his recognition that it was African song altered in America by a "tragic intensification") are more interesting than what Du Bois actually writes. It is not entirely Sundquist's fault. The spirituals themselves take over. They are more essential to black writing than the example of Du Bois can indicate. "My analysis," Sundquist admits, "relies, paradoxically, on evidence that is not in Du Bois's text at all."

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His discussion of the music—amplified by apt allusion to modern writers like Hurston, Johnson, Baldwin, Ellison, and Paule Marshall—is consistently rewarding. Sundquist emphasizes that white listeners usually failed to comprehend this music, the reality of its anguish and despair, its rage. He echoes here a complaint that innumerable black writers have made, none more eloquently than Frederick Douglass in 1845:

> I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears.

Du Bois understands the same point, but his words fail to sing so convincingly:

> [The slave-song] has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but notwithstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.

Even as Sundquist repeats these familiar arguments it is important to note that not all white listeners failed to understand. Thomas Wentworth Higginson wrote in 1867 that "Wrestling Jacob" (a song Du Bois evokes at the culmination of *The Souls of Black Folk*) was "one of the wildest and most striking" spirituals of all those he had collected; he felt its "mystical effect and passionate striving" in the music, not the words. Emily Dickinson could not have been immune to these remarks, nor to the music of the sorrow songs, when she wrote in "The Soul has Bandaged moments" (#512) of

> The Soul's retaken moments—
> When, Felon led along,
> With shackles on the plumed feet,
> And staples, in the song.

Dickinson's response remained private, of course, but Higginson's was published in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

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On a smaller scale Shelley Fisher Fishkin's study makes many of the same arguments: hearing black voices in such a canonical text as *Huckleberry Finn* attests to their vital contributions—not just their marginalized presence—in American culture. She credits Twain with "validating the *authority* of vernacular culture more boldly than any book that had gone before," just as Sundquist credits Chesnutt and Du Bois. She too ventures into the racial ambiguities of "blackface minstrelsy" and demonstrates—rather more successfully than Sundquist—how signifying works. She is a much more textual and specific explicator than he. While she lacks his historical authority and breadth, Fishkin can be refreshingly exact. She documents every sketch that Twain wrote in Negro dialect, traces the influence of every black person he knew well as a child, mentions every black person he befriended as an adult, lists every black student whose education he financed.

Huck "is black," Fishkin argues, in the sense that his language derives mainly and essentially from the Negro vernacular that Twain heard as a child and enthusiastically transcribed in various sketches like "Sociable Jimmy" and "A True Story" as an adult. She proves her theory surprisingly well, by detailed comparison of the dialect sketches with passages from the novel. But there are some nagging problems: (a) Fishkin tends to equate *all* vernacular, *any* vernacular, with blacks; (b) she overrides Twain's prefatory note about the *various* dialects he has carefully differentiated, only one of which is black; (c) she fails to explain how Huck can be black linguistically but in no other demonstrable way; and (d) she must face a tricky but interesting question: if Huck's voice is authentically black, what is Jim's?

Attempting to explain (c) for example, Fishkin claims that Huck Finn's skill as a "trickster, a figure intimately linked with signifying," connects him with traditional African folklore. The trouble is, Huck performs no signifying at all: no coded messages, no rhetorical improvisation, no ironic metaphor. Jim does, however, as Fishkin suggests in attempting to deal with (d). Although Jim *seems* to embody a series of demeaning racial stereotypes—ignorance, superstition, slow-wittedness, gullibility—Fishkin suggests, with help from others like David L. Smith, that Twain's purpose was to criticize and overturn those ster-

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eotypes.[3] While Jim may seem foolish in saying, "I awluz liked dead people, en done all I could for 'em," he is actually expressing reverence for the dead, a serious corrective to Huck's earlier flippancy, "I don't take no stock in dead people." While Jim seems extravagantly taken in by the hair-ball prank, imagining that he was bewitched and ridden by witches all over the state, he is actually signifying: outwitting his tormentors by verbal extravagance, turning humiliation into victory. (Morrison uses the same device in *Song of Solomon*: "If you can't take advantage, take *dis*advantage.") In the "Was Solomon Wise?" chapter Jim's argument works so well that you begin to wonder whether, given the subtlety of signifying, he was not masquerading from the start. And when Huck tries to fool Jim by sneaking aboard the raft and claiming he never left, Jim's improvisation on the trash is signifying at its most eloquent.

Twain himself may well have been signifying when he wrote the novel's prefatory "Notice": "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot." Prosecution, banishment, and being shot were not really jokes but metaphors masquerading as jokes; they criticize savagely a society that would not tolerate any exposure of its racist hypocrisies.

Unfortunately Fishkin only sketches the beginnings of such an approach to the novel; I have improved on her examples and added several of my own. She remains troubled by Jim. She suspects Twain of racist leanings, of a dubious enthusiasm for the minstrel show. David Smith's arguments are too subtle for her, and she does not quite believe in Jim's signifying. She concludes by letting politics supersede critical understanding: "One cannot get around the fact that Jim's voice is, ultimately, a diminished voice, a voice cramped within boundaries as confining as his prison-shack on the Phelps Plantation." Ironically, she is the one who has "cramped" and "diminished" that voice by failing to hear it. She commits the very error her whole book attempts to warn against.

[3] Smith's essay, "Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse," is an important contribution to the arguments of Sundquist, Fishkin, and Morrison. It appears in *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on "Huckleberry Finn,"* ed. by J. S. Leonard et al. (Durham, N.C., 1991).

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Yet the final effect of Fishkin's study, especially when placed alongside Sundquist's, is stimulating. Both books dramatize how necessary, and how much more complex and interesting, it is to admit that African American writing is not marginal, and never really has been. It is liberating to recognize that black voices, and the culture they carry in them, can be heard in the most surprising places, that they *resonate* in so much of American literature. Perhaps best of all, Fishkin and Sundquist have crossed color lines and risked writing about black and white literature together. Might not others do the same? Surely it is time now to desegregate our critical assumptions.

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BROOKS HAXTON

Limpopo, Orinoco, or Yazoo

We built a log raft of straight logs
lashed snug with twisted ropes of bark.
It floated, and since we were friends and boys,
we let the river slip away with it toward sea.

Enormous trees on shore looked godly, and they spoke,
their voices blending with the river
in the noise of insect, bird, and treefrog,
in the one long voice made night and day by rain.

We held each other sometimes to be warm.
We argued, tried kind words, withdrew.
We took a little swim to cheer us up.

The lemurs looked so tender coming down
along lianas out of the canopy, almost
as if they might bestow lost blessedness,
until they snatched the food.

And orchids, delicate and various, grew wild.
And there were the purest, whitest wading birds
with red eyes and blue legs, and bills
for pickaxing into the skulls of snakes . . .
they swallowed them head-first, still writhing
inside, in the gulping snakelike neck.

A cayman cruising under us broke water,
roared, and circled back. The river
opened into the sea. Our mission
must have been complete, although we could not,
even when we knew, say what it was.

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Memoires Nostalgiques de Cockaigne

Breath on the window froze. Before sleep,
bed warmers. Samovars. Corn whiskey.
Kissing under the goosedown. Then, long dreams
of animals, and journeys, and the returning dead.

*

Winter nights only the library stayed warm.
From inkstrokes flickering after a thousand years
the words in Aramaic, Mandarin, and Maya
fluttered the tongue and took flight into the mind.

*

Then, first thing in fair weather,
there was the hunt. The trout stream.
Fog in the ruined cathedral. Or pure
laziness with coffee and warm bread.

*

And on the shingle after dusk
while eight-foot combers crashed
into the rattle under the stridulous gulls,
whoever wept felt cleansed.

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From the Outside

Brown leaves made of the hill
a raw sienna cloud.
Already I stood ankle-deep. A leaf
glanced off one shoulder, brown
with a remnant green, and red.

And stooping for it, stumbling,
plunging the heels of both hands
up to the wrist in leaves,

I felt almost, beyond the shock
of solid ground, as though
my body might float through,
as after all it does.

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RICHARD HORNBY

Shakespeare in Oregon

THERE ARE OVER 300 SHAKESPEARE FESTIVALS in the United States, most of which are terrible. Americans' love of the Bard is like Olivia's infatuation with Cesario in *Twelfth Night*: "I would you were as I would have you be." Stoutly believing that Shakespeare has eternal value, we nonetheless alter his dress, speech, politics, and entire philosophical outlook to make him "relevant" to today. Shakespeare must never change *us*, nor even challenge us, but must tell us what we already know—that fascism is bad, that racism is worse, that women are oppressed. Shakespeare is not only our contemporary, but politically correct as well.

A refreshing exception to the sorry rule is one of the oldest Shakespeare companies in America, the Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon. Perhaps because of its age (it was established in 1935, on the site of an old Chautauqua theatre going back to 1893), or its isolation (the nearest city is Medford—where?—Oregon), they appear to have missed the fashionable approach of updated Shakespeare, instead making an honest attempt to grapple with the historical, poetic, and philosophical challenges that the plays present.

Last summer I visited Ashland for the first time, seeing eight plays from their twelve-play season, which runs from February to October. The impression one gets of the place is of considerable insularity; unlike other major festivals, they do not use celebrity actors or directors, nor bring in touring shows, while their own touring is limited to a winter season in Portland. Ashland itself is quite small, so that, from a downtown hotel, it is possible to see the Festival without needing a car. (Furthermore, having supped full of horrors at Shakespeare festivals in three countries, I am happy to report that there are a surprising number of good, medium-priced restaurants in the downtown area as well.)

Actors at Ashland are paid Equity scale wages, giving them an adequate income over the nine-month season, but not usually enough to make Ashland their permanent base. On the other hand, many of them return for season after season, becoming associated with the Festival in the minds of the audience; Ashland is thus one of the few American theatres to compare with the great Canadian or European permanent repertory companies. The quality of the acting is, in some instances, world class, though in lesser roles ability sometimes falls off noticeably. Nevertheless, the acting is always intelligent, showing an

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understanding and appreciation of the material, rather than an attempt to cram it into the procrustean bed of American naturalism. The actors work hard on speaking verse, for example, with two vocal coaches on staff; the results with weaker actors may sometimes sound labored, but always demonstrate clarity, rhythm, and comprehension. The majority of the actors have been trained at West-Coast universities; indeed, the whole Festival can be seen as a triumph of West-Coast theatre departments, which have a long history, and which typically provide a more balanced, classically-oriented instruction than at departments elsewhere in the United States. Angus Bowmer, founder of the Festival, was a professor at Southern Oregon State College, and the Festival remains academic in the best sense—insightful, committed, faithful to history without being fussy, scholarly without being pedantic, adventuresome without being faddish.

The oldest of the three theatres at Ashland is the outdoor Elizabethan Theatre, recently enhanced by a $7.6 million audience pavilion, to provide improved acoustics and sightlines, along with better lighting possibilities. The stagehouse itself, dating back to 1935, is based on theories of Shakespeare's Globe that are now outmoded: In place of its quaint, Tudor, half-timbered façade, the Globe stagehouse actually had Baroque architecture, complete with imitation marble columns and statuary. The "inner below," a small, recessed performing area at the back of the large platform stage, was concocted in the 1930s because no one then could imagine a stage without a proscenium arch, however small, but from all the evidence it appears that Elizabethan theatres used an open platform, augmented by an upper stage or balcony that had no alcove below it. Finally, the Ashland stage is tapered, a shape that C. Walter Hodges debunked back in the 1950s, but which has made a comeback since the excavation of the Rose Theatre in London five years ago. Nonetheless, despite these quibbles, the theatre represents an honest attempt to deal with Shakespeare historically.

A Midsummer Night's Dream was the weakest of the three productions I saw in the Elizabethan Theatre. The Tudor façade made the stage seem drab rather than magical; Michael Ganio, the designer, augmented it with wildly colored drapery, which just looked out of place. Similarly, John Carver Sullivan's costumes were a hodgepodge of styles; Theseus and Hippolyta were in modern evening dress, Bottom wore blue overalls, and Oberon looked like Long John Silver. While a lack of specificity in dress is true to Elizabethan practice (a surviving picture of a production of *Titus Andronicus* shows an actor wearing a toga, watched by others in sixteenth-century doublet and hose), the world of the play should show some ultimate unity, however fanciful. Director Cynthia White's staging was generally effective; she used the "inner below," which would have swallowed up any major action placed in it, only for entrances and exits, and used a lot of vertical movement, including a fire pole for amusing quick drops from the

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upper stage. The tapering of the main stage, however, meant that here, as for the other two productions I saw, the action tended to be monotonously central. Although the stage is large, matching the Globe's 43 by 27½ feet, the areas at its sides were almost useless for playing scenes. Theatre historians take note.

The acting in *Midsummer* ranged from good to fair. Philip Hubbard and Linda Alper were suitably elegant as Duke Theseus and his bride Hippolyta; Molly Mayock was a very well-spoken Titania, but unfortunately Director White gave some of her lines to an invented sidekick, "Melusina," played only tolerably by Tamu Gray. Dan Kremer performed Oberon with an unusual, nasty swagger that I liked, while Anthony DeFonte was big, fat, and funny as Nick Bottom, the archetypal ham actor. The rest of the "mechanicals" were tame, however, so that their performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe," which should be the hilarious climax to the play, had me dozing. Similarly, the two pairs of young lovers were wooden—and sexless.

A better production was John Webster's 1612 tragedy, *The White Devil*. Jacobean tragedy is not to everyone's taste; playwrights like Webster were more interested in bizarre behavior, striking permutations, and dazzling poetic imagery than in plausibility or consistency. *The White Devil* is a tale of lust, fratricide, revenge, satire, ghosts, and gore. One character dies from kissing her husband's portrait, which turns out to have been poisoned; another dies during a tournament from poison in his helmet. When arch-villain Flamineo stabs his brother Marcello, after a brief altercation, the act is not so much motivated as it is *flaunted*; its very abruptness is savored for its outrageousness. "I would have our plot be ingenious," cries the vengeful Count Lodovico, and it certainly is.

Jerry Turner staged the action in a straightforward way, without apology or archness, using music underneath many of the scenes to enhance mood. Designer Richard L. Hay augmented the somber tan and brown façade of the stagehouse with green marble trim, using small period furniture pieces to establish specific locales. Elizabeth Novak's rich costumes, all in black, gold, and silver, glowed under James Sale's chiaroscuro lighting, which was augmented by many torches and candles. The result of all the talented design work was an elegant piece of Baroque atmosphere, matched by a generally strong cast, most notably Paul Vincent O'Connor as the wicked Cardinal Monticelso.

Visually, then, *The White Devil* was the best production to use the Ashland Elizabethan Theatre, demonstrating that there is no such thing as a "neutral" stage setting. The permanent façade worked because it was appropriate to Webster's somber, malicious play, but failed for *Midsummer Night's Dream*, even when augmented. Theatre historians should again take note; we tend to glorify the sparsity of scenery on the Elizabethan stage, but there was probably more than

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we realize, or else the Elizabethans must have watched with their eyes closed.

In terms of acting, the best production to use the Elizabethan Theatre was *Antony and Cleopatra*, starring Henry Woronicz, Artistic Director of the Festival, and Megan Cole. Woronicz was a bit young for Antony, but with his solid physique, handsome bearded face, and powerful but well-modulated voice, he was by far the best American I have ever seen in the role of "Herculean Roman." He really did look like a statue of a Roman god, yet also moved and spoke with fluid power. Cole, like Woronicz, also has a beautiful face and body; I found her vocal technique too overt, but her emotional range was vast and true, and she moved like a female panther.

Director Charles Towers was another to run into trouble with the rustic Tudor façade. *Antony and Cleopatra* alternates between two locales, Rome and Egypt, the former described (as in all of Shakespeare's Roman plays) as dry, meager, and austere, in contrast with the latter, which is moist, expansive, and sunny. William Bloodgood's settings did nothing to express the contrast, which is at the very core of the play, since it reflects Antony's inner conflict between duty and love. Candice Cain's costumes realized the opposition, however: The Romans generally wore austere leather jerkins, with Octavius at one point wearing a long, tight brown cloak, making him look Puritanical; the Egyptians wore loose, flowing robes in light, pastel colors, exposing a lot of flesh, which, especially in Megan Cole's case, was quite pleasant to behold.

In addition to its 1193-seat Elizabethan Theatre, Ashland now operates two indoor theatres, the Angus Bowmer, a pleasant, 600-seat proscenium house, and the Black Swan, a "black box" theatre with flexible seating arrangements for about 150. The latter seemed too small. Other festivals typically have an alternative performance space seating three or four hundred; to drop this low means that most potential audience members, who are usually in Ashland for only a few days, will be turned away. Thus even a weak play like Paula Vogel's *The Baltimore Waltz* had people outside desperately holding up signs to buy tickets. The piece deals with a young woman (based on the playwright herself) who, feeling guilty for the lack of attention she paid her brother when he was dying of AIDS, has a long fantasy in which *she* is dying, while her loving brother takes her on a lengthy trip to Europe. The woman's affliction is "Acquired Toilet Disease," which sets the stage for a succession of tedious toilet jokes and pallid sexual fantasies. The woman's feelings for her brother are complex and suggest incest, but are largely unexplored, the play remaining almost entirely on a sophomoric level. Vogel is an American playwright of no particular aptitude; *The Baltimore Waltz*, given a well-acted production in a tiny venue, looked suspiciously like a token New (though not original—it was first done by Circle Rep in New York) American Play.

A better work in the Black Swan was Caryl Churchill's *Mad Forest*.

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Churchill is a politically committed English playwright whose plays are sometimes lively and insightful, and sometimes talky and dull. *Mad Forest*, which deals with the 1989 revolution against the Ceausescu government in Romania, starts well, with brief vignettes of daily life under a Communist regime. Because of electronic surveillance, nothing can be said directly, but small items—a few eggs, a pack of Western cigarettes, a letter from the United States—can take on ominous significance. Despite the pointillist technique, we not only get a good picture of life under totalitarianism, but of a particular family with all its loves and stresses and worries.

When the revolution comes, it is not shown, but maladroitly described in an endless interlude of exposition; where before Churchill said a lot with a little, she now says very little at great length. Happily, she then shifts back to scenes of family life, this time after the revolution. A wedding brings out all the pettiness, feuding, and racism (anti-Hungarian, anti-Gypsy) that had previously been latent; our simple, black-and-white picture of Communism versus freedom is displaced by some disturbing shades of gray. Despite its unevenness, *Mad Forest* is an effective little play about recent events in Eastern Europe, a living newspaper that is more illuminating and challenging than most journalism on the subject. Fontaine Syer directed the versatile cast of a dozen proficiently, bringing Budapest to life on the postage-stamp stage.

I saw three good productions in the Bowmer: an effervescent staging of Georges Feydeau's *A Flea in Her Ear*, a rather somber version of Pierre Corneille's *The Illusion*, and a magnificent rendering of Shakespeare's *Richard III*, the highlight of the Festival. *Flea*, written in 1907, is classic French farce, involving sexual intrigue, mistaken identity, whirlwind action, and a large collection of stock characters of almost every European nationality. Sudden, unexpected entrances were essential to French farce, which were usually done through doors (the box set, with functional doors, was a recent innovation), but Feydeau here even uses a revolving bed to spin characters on and off! Feydeau was a master of comic *builds*: A character has a speech impediment, which is funny enough in itself (and, like many farce elements, potentially offensive). A doctor gives him a silver palate, so that he suddenly talks like James Earl Jones. The fellow cleanses the palate in a glass of carbolic, which a crazy Spanish nobleman accidentally drinks. The palate gets lost, then found. And on, and on, and on, in true "situation comedy," unlike the talky version of American television. Yet this is only one plot line among several!

The Ashland production was elegant and lively to an extreme. Richard L. Hay created magnificent interiors, using Art Nouveau decors and mostly pastel colors, and a reproduction of Manet's *Olympia* on the wall; Charles Berliner's costumes were an exaggerated version of styles that were exaggerated to begin with, an explosion of puffs and pleats and bustles and ruffles and colors and fabrics.

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Although Peter Silbert looked a little old in the principal roles of romantic husband and his carbon copy, a drunken hotel porter, his performances were agile and vitalized. Kenneth Albers directed the fine cast in a broad style that was nonetheless precisely accomplished. The production was not as the French would do the play, and thus offended purists (including a professor friend of mine), but came off like "The Marx Brothers Meet Feydeau," funny, sassy, and incredibly energetic.

Pierre Corneille (1606–84) is of course best known for his heroic masterpiece, *The Cid*, but in fact he wrote a wide range of plays, including many comedies. *The Illusion*, written just before *The Cid* in 1636, is ultimately a comedy, although the joke, anticipating Pirandello, turns out to be on the audience. Pridamant, a wealthy Parisian lawyer, longs to see his son Clindor, from whom he has been estranged for fifteen years. To get help in tracking down the young man, he visits a Touraine magician named Alcandre, who magically shows episodes from the son's intervening career. Running into a wide variety of people, falling in and out of love, fighting duels, killing a man, and finally getting killed himself, Clindor seems to have led an amazingly active life. Pridamant is distraught at losing his son; now they can never be reconciled. Then a final scene is shown in which Clindor is lined up with some others, getting money. "Do the dead get paid?" asks Pridamant, with childlike astonishment. But no, explains the magician, what has actually been depicted was the son's career on the Parisian stage! Pridamant, who previously had a low opinion of the theatre, has been so impressed by "l'éclat, l'utilité, l'appas," that he decides that his son's métier is actually better than his own, and rushes off to Paris to find him.

Tony Kushner, author of *Angels in America*, heavily adapted Corneille's text, making what was dry and witty into something more somber and disturbing. The magician's grotto is shifted to Provence, that land of mystics and prognosticators like Nostradamus. The magician now has a mutilated, deaf-and-dumb servant, and Corneille's droll ending is darkened. The payroll scene is cut, and instead of rushing off to Paris, Pridamant, disturbed that his son has taken on a low profession, opines that he might just visit him in the spring—if the roads are passable. The Christian theme of learning through suffering has been replaced by the modern idea that character is destiny; you can't teach an old lawyer new tricks. Late twentieth-century cynicism has so toned down Corneille's exuberance that Kushner should really be listed as co-author.

Richard L. Hay designed a Disneyish set for the grotto, while director Pat Patton gave Alcandre (played as female by Molly Mayock) some standard magic tricks to enhance the spookiness. The scenes from the plays within the play, however, were more genuinely artistic, capturing the flair of the Baroque stage, with its stock characters and fanciful settings. Sandy McCallum and Don Burroughs were nicely

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affecting as father and son, recapturing some of the sentiment of the original. It is a sign of artistic health when a theatre company does lesser-known world classics like *The Illusion*, even in adaptation, though I would still love to see the play performed as Corneille wrote it.

The production of *The Illusion*, then, though set in the same period and country as the original, took wild liberties with the text. By contrast, James Edmondson's direction of *Richard III* was faithful to both the spirit and the letter of Shakespeare's text, despite a setting and costumes that were anything but Elizabethan. Before the play began, we saw a steel, Constructivist setting (designed by William Bloodgood) on the uncurtained stage, with stairs, landings, and a kind of balcony all painted black. The structure thus echoed that of the Elizabethan stage, but looked more like a munitions factory. Body bags littered the floor.

As the lights come up, women enter in mourning, identifying their dead; we were on a battlefield. Men remove the bodies, tossing them into a wide, horizontal trap. In hobbles a tall, strong, coarse-looking man, dressed all in black; as a result of some congenital deformity, he wears a gleaming stainless steel brace on his leg, and another on his shoulder. His lurching gait nonetheless suggests strength and vigor. Pausing, he takes a swig from a hip flask. Smiling sarcastically at the audience, he announces in a big, bold baritone voice, "Now is the winter of our discontent / Made glorious summer by this son of York!" Thus begins the best production of *Richard III* I have ever seen on this continent, with the best Shakespearean performance, bar none, I have ever seen by an American.

Marco Barricelli, a young man, has had six seasons at Ashland, plus others at mostly West-Coast theatres. He bears something of a resemblance to Laurence Olivier, especially in the scene when he put on a king's crown and robe, recalling the often-reprinted still of Olivier's face from the movie of the play. His voice is stronger than Olivier's, but well modulated. Some Ashland regulars were complaining, before the show, that Barricelli had previously shown a tendency to shout. It is true that actors with good voices tend to overuse them, but here Barricelli shouted no more than necessary (after all, this is a flamboyant role!), using pitch and tone and rhythm as well as volume to develop Shakespeare's character. With a wicked gleam in his eye, he seemed to realize that Richard III is basically a comic role; Shaw once compared him to Mr. Punch of the Punch and Judy shows, knocking off adversaries with unself-conscious glee.

One of the problems with Richard's deformity is that he must nevertheless seduce Lady Anne into marrying him (after having killed her husband and father-in-law!), and that he must be a convincing warrior in the battle scenes. Barricelli's size, strength, vigor, and commanding presence made all this seem natural; he was unquestionably misshapen, "a bottled spider," but it seemed to give him demonic charm and strength rather than to diminish him.

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Edmondson directed *Richard III* with intelligence and imagination. All-black Shakespeare has become a bit of a cliché, but it was so well done here that I did not mind it. Deborah M. Dryden designed black leather costumes with silver trim (including Richard's braces) that suggested, without being too specific, Mussolini's Black Shirts. The tone of the play was rough and dynamic rather than somber. Like Barricelli, Edmondson had a comic flair; inspired by the line about dogs barking at Richard's passing, for example, he had most of Richard's entrances underscored by the sound effect of barking, a literal running gag as unseen dogs chased him onto the stage. Edmondson also had men from time to time imitate Richard's rough gait, in mockery.

The production showed a considerable sense of history, both theatrical and political. In addition to Olivier's Richard, there were echoes of Antony Sher's of a decade ago, also in black, which had Richard on metallic crutches, and influences of Orson Welles's famous 1930s fascist version of Julius Caesar. The Mussolini connection was underscored when Richard, dead, was hung up by his heels.

The *Richard III* production, then, was a perfect example of how an "academic" approach to the classics can be the opposite of sterile. There is a false belief among many American theatre people that any study of theatre history will inhibit their creativity, making them mere imitators. That can happen, but only if you do not study that history *enough*. Drink deep from the Pierian Spring—i.e., steal from everybody—and you will become genuinely creative and innovative, like these Ashlanders.

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KAREN WILKIN

Remembering Balanchine

FOR SOME OF US LAST SPRING, the only consolation for the ending of the Museum of Modern Art's Matisse retrospective was the New York City Ballet's Balanchine Celebration, a similarly ambitious effort to track the evolution of a pivotal figure of modernism, as surely the twentieth century's greatest choreographer as Matisse was arguably its greatest painter. In the same way that the MoMA exhibition made clear the full complexity of Matisse's art, revealing him as an artist who constantly challenged himself over more than half a century of working life, the NYCB's unfolding of what survive of Balanchine's ballets, from the late 1920s to the year before his death in 1983—a work span equal to Matisse's—made plain the full breadth and variety, the staggering inventiveness of the ballet master's achievement.

The two never worked together, although it would have been possible. Despite more than thirty years' difference in their ages—Matisse was born on the last day of 1869, Balanchine in 1904—their careers overlapped by more than a quarter century, since Balanchine was a prodigy who began to work for Diaghilev at twenty-one, with something of a history as a choreographer even then, and Matisse, happily, was extremely long-lived. His celebrated decor for Massine's ballet *Rouge et Noir*, for example, was done in 1939, five years after Balanchine made *Serenade* for his first collection of American dancers. A Matisse-Balanchine collaboration—perhaps with music by Stravinsky—is a tantalizing idea.

Like Matisse, Balanchine was both radical innovator and preserver of a great tradition, an explorer of the outer reaches of the possible who also paid homage to his ancestors, expanding their legacy by translating it into his own compelling language. Matisse's work before World War I is compounded out of his rejection of the Academy, his admiration for Cézanne, for Persian miniatures, for African carving, and for Giotto, along with his awareness of what Picasso was up to, to say nothing of his own formidable powers of invention. Matisse's later work often suggests that he pitted himself against an entire inherited tradition of representation without reproducing its conventions or techniques. In the same way, Balanchine could draw upon a vocabulary of pure classical dance, pay his respects to the romantic rebellion of Fokine and the strict traditionalism of Petipa, and evoke the spectacle of the Imperial Ballet of his childhood, all without abdicating his power to rethink how the human body can move through

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space, how movement and music can be interwoven. (Yes, I know it has a great deal to do with the music Balanchine used.)

This lifelong dialogue with both iconoclasm and tradition is what ultimately links Matisse and Balanchine. It's most apparent in Matisse's art in his insistence on figuration, especially in his use of the female figure, as the source of his most inspired and daring departures, and most apparent in Balanchine's work in his adherence to the strict language of classic ballet—not that he was any less devoted to the female body than Matisse—as the source of *his* most inspired and daring departures.

The assumption, whether explicit or implicit, of an "ideal," external prototype is fundamental to both Matisse's and Balanchine's art. Matisse's incisive, unpredictable images are more eloquent because we measure them against our knowledge of the body. Because we are so familiar with how figures look and occupy space, we simultaneously recognize the accuracy of Matisse's evocations and the distance he has travelled from literal rendering. In the same way, a flexed foot, a turned-in knee, a collapsed or inverted posture in Balanchine's choreography, gains impact and expressiveness in contrast to the conventions of classical dance: the turned-out legs and the codified positions of body, arms, legs, and feet that have their origins in the court dances of Louis XIV and their modern development in Balanchine's own Russian training.

Balanchine's apparent disregard for these conventions is no more arbitrary than Matisse's apparent disregard for human anatomy and proportion. Just as Matisse's "distortions" are equivalents for the weight and motion of the body in space, at the same time that they defy expected, inherited ways of describing the figure, Balanchine's "distortions" are, in fact, intimately linked to the character of the music that drives the dance, appearing most consistently in ballets set to twentieth-century composers, such as Webern, Hindemith, or Stravinsky. Balanchine's inversions of traditional steps and poses are equivalents for dissonant harmonies, for wrenched rhythms and tonalities, at the same time that they signal his defiance of the inherited language of movement that is his starting point. More accurately, they signal Balanchine's desire to expand that language, since he happily and imaginatively used traditional movements when he worked with eighteenth- or nineteenth-century music—which is not to say that he wouldn't discover "dissonant" movements in Mozart, or traditional steps in Ives, in order to make the full complexity of the music visible in an abstract way. Yet it's arguable that no matter how nameable or familiar the step or position—the "pure" *attitudes, arabesques*, and *développés à la seconde* of Balanchine's most classical *pas de deux*—the dancer's striving to execute the step as perfectly as possible renders the whole activity an abstraction. As the critic Arlene Croce wrote, perceptively, "the *arabesque* is real; the leg isn't."

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The Balanchine Celebration offered ample opportunity to ponder such questions, along with innumerable other pleasures and challenges. The event seemed faintly miraculous to those of us raised on the New York City Ballet, especially those of us old enough to have grown up with the company and watched its repertory evolve during the glory years of the 1950s and early 1960s. That was the period when Balanchine, having established his school, and a permanent company in a permanent home at the City Center, now set about training his audience. It's possible that he could have flourished only in New York. (An early suggestion that the school and company be established in Hartford, Connecticut, under the auspices of the Wadsworth Atheneum, was quickly rejected.) Certainly the New York dance audience, whose eye and taste Balanchine largely formed during his fifty-year sojourn in this country, claims him, a Russian in impeccable cowboy shirts and string ties, as our own.

Those formative early years were the era of Maria Tallchief, Tanaquil LeClercq, Diana Adams, Melissa Hayden, and Allegra Kent, of Jacques d'Amboise, Arthur Mitchell, the young Edward Villella and the perennial Francisco Moncion. They were the years of *La Valse, Ivesiana, Divertimento No. 15, Episodes, Agon*, and even *Nutcracker*. (I was a student at the School of American Ballet then, and as a D class member—the company class in those days—and a *Nutcracker* kid, I attended a remarkable number of performances, thanks to the kindness of the company's manager, Barbara Horgan, who handed out comps.)

The Celebration gave us old Balanchine hands a chance to see again ballets that haven't been in the repertory for decades, to test memory against actuality, as we watched current incarnations through the filter of recollections of original performances and performers. It brought back to life all of Balanchine's ballets that could be reconstituted, about 70 works in all—a fraction of the 425 pieces, counting recensions and restagings, cited in NYCB documentation. Since the performances were roughly chronological, Balanchine's development became more of an issue than usual; links between works became clear, yet more astonishing was the variety of his invention. Ballets notable for their tenderness, delicacy, romanticism, or classicism, were produced almost simultaneously with others even more striking for their ferocity, for permanently altering how we think human limbs can articulate themselves in space. But perhaps the greatest lesson of the Celebration was to make us aware of how fragile, how unstable, how tenuous Balanchine's legacy is.

Some of this is due to the very nature of dance—intensely physical, but utterly ephemeral, dependent, like music and drama, on time and the limits of the individual. But there is no convenient system of notation for dance, no easily mastered equivalent of a printed text or a sheet of music. Film and video are helpful, but more than perhaps any other art, dance depends for its transmission on memory. Just as

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a tradition of movement is passed directly from teacher to student, ballets are kept alive by the dancers who performed them teaching their parts to other dancers. Companies depend on those rare individuals who manage to keep chunks of the repertory in their heads and their bodily memories. When a company other than the NYCB wants to mount a Balanchine work, for example, one of a handful of former Balanchine dancers is called into service to set the ballet. But is it the same? Can even the NYCB's performances be the same, ten years after the master's death? The company is now full of dancers, some more technically adroit than ever, who have never worked with Mr. B., who were not trained, as their predecessors were, by his colleagues from the days of the Imperial Ballet and Diaghilev.

There are no clear answers. Balanchine said very little about any of this. He left no declaration of intent other than the ballets themselves and his fifty-year history of work in this country. When he taught or worked with his dancers, he preferred to demonstrate, rather than to explain or comment. A rare, drawn out "Thaaaat's right!" was as much as you dared hope for. And his predictions about the future of his company were contradictory, at best. Rosemary Dunleavy, the company's present ballet mistress (a living repository of the Balanchine repertory) says that one of the last things she remembers Mr. B.'s saying was, "You know, these are my ballets. In the years to come they will be rehearsed by other people. They will be danced by other people. But no matter what, they are still my ballets." Yet Rudolf Nureyev recalls Balanchine's saying, "When I die, everything should vanish. A new person should come and impose his own new things."

It's not surprising. Balanchine was notoriously hard to pin down, mercurial, someone who delighted in contradiction and change. This emerges clearly in Francis Mason's absorbing collection of interviews, *I Remember Balanchine: Recollections of the Ballet Master by Those Who Knew Him.*[1] The book, which could be read as a subtext of the Celebration, provides a full-length portrait of an elusive Balanchine as he is reflected in the eyes of friends and colleagues from all stages of his long career. The comments of Natalie Molostwoff, the School of American Ballet's director emeritus, are typical: "Distant Balanchine was not, but knowable, I'm not sure. He would lose interest in a particular group of friends and move completely to another. He needed change."

Mason interviewed dancers, company and school staff, fellow choreographers, even doctors. It's an impressive, comprehensive list, from early associates—Alexandra Danilova, Tamara Geva, Tamara Toumanova—to the American dancers of Balanchine's middle years—Tallchief, Adams, D'Amboise, Villella, Mitchell—and of his

[1] I REMEMBER BALANCHINE: Recollections of the Ballet Master by Those Who Knew Him, by *Francis Mason.* Anchor Books. April 1992. $15.00p.

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last decades—Peter Martins, Karin von Aroldingen, Merrill Ashley, Darci Kistler—plus wild cards—Ray Bolger, for whom *Slaughter on Tenth Avenue* was originally choreographed in 1936, and a young woman who performed in the famous elephant ballet Balanchine did for Barnum and Bailey.

There are also gaps. Vera Zorina, Suzanne Farrell, and Jerome Robbins were writing their own books when Mason was preparing his and preferred not to participate. (Robbins' book should be worth waiting for.) Tanaquil LeClercq, whose dazzling career was brutally ended by polio, did not wish to be interviewed. Mikhail Baryshnikov, who danced briefly but significantly with the NYCB, was unique in not responding to a request for an interview. While we might regret the absence of these luminaries, especially Robbins, who enjoyed a unique relationship with Mr. B. as dancer, and greatly respected peer and collaborator, the book has no lack of illuminating material.

There's a vivid, richly documented account of Balanchine's Russian years, a brilliant analysis of the future ballet master's heritage and formation, by the noted Russian dance historian, Yuri Slonimsky, Balanchine's contemporary and close friend in those formative days. There's an excited 1933 letter from the young Lincoln Kirstein, declaring "a real chance to have an American ballet," and a series of insightful accounts by backstage colleagues, particularly the NYCB's heroic administrator, Betty Cage, and its long-time principal conductor, Hugo Fiorato.

Fiorato's comments on Balanchine's relationship to music are penetrating. The son and brother of musicians, Balanchine studied piano seriously, and his profound technical understanding of music was as crucial as his sense of movement and his technical understanding of dance. Fiorato says: "He had the faculty of not just interpreting the music or putting steps on top of the score. He added another dimension. It's as though he added contrapuntal rhythms, phrasing, line, that made the score more attractive, interesting, and exciting, and clarified the intent of the composer. Balanchine added content that went with the music but was another part that became integral to the score."

An equally revealing comment comes from a more unexpected source: Paul Mejia, a product of the School of American Ballet, who joined the company at seventeen and, more important, was actively encouraged to choreograph by Balanchine. While Mejia has had a substantial career as choreographer and artistic director of several American companies, he is best known for marrying Mr. B.'s "muse," Suzanne Farrell, and carrying her off to dance with Maurice Bejart in Paris. But Mejia has far more interesting things to offer than his version of the Farrell drama, notably his recollections of Balanchine's seminars for teachers: "He took beautiful chords—for instance, a major chord, diminished, augmented, or triads—and he would take three girls and visualize the chords for us. Here is a major chord. Now

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how are you going to go from a major to a minor, let's say? Can you do it visually? We know that the note goes down half a step, but that doesn't mean the dancers are going to do that."

The evidence of the ballets bears out such memories. Inversions of steps, reversals of direction, changes in level and speed correspond to harmonic and rhythmic shifts; repetitions of whole combinations and configurations, welcome as opportunities to see again subtleties of movement, to grasp their inherent logic and orderliness, are equivalents for restatements of musical themes.

Observations like Fiorato's or reminiscences like Mejia's stud Mason's book, yet in some ways, a clearer picture emerges of the people interviewed than of Balanchine himself. Sometimes ego takes over—"That's enough about me. This is what Mr. B. thought about my dancing"—but there is also the problem—there's no way to put this tactfully—of many dancers' being not very bright.[2]

There are exceptions. Marian Horosko, who danced with the company in the 1950s, provides an invaluable discussion of how Balanchine worked and incisive comments on his choreography, but Moira Shearer, of *Red Shoes* fame, is a model of wrong-headedness, thinly veneered with peculiarly English niceness. "Obviously," she says, "Balanchine would have liked to stay in England and make his career here rather than in the United States." Shearer *adores* Balanchine's work and can't understand why her compatriots are less enthusiastic. But she has this to say about *Agon*, the 1957 collaboration with Stravinsky that produced what still seems like a whole new way of moving, an unprecedented way of wordlessly embodying potent emotion: ". . . such a funny, witty ballet, so smart and sophisticated. . . ."

The British often dismissed such choreography as "step-for-note" dancing, so it's comforting to have Balanchine's views on English ballet. Daniel Duell, a principal dancer in the 1970s and 1980s, recalls Mr. B.'s describing it as, "Very proper, exactly right, and not very interesting. It's like having tea in England—you have to sit down very proper, and they bring you tea in a tiny little cup, and a tiny little spoon, and a big lump of sugar; you don't know how it's going to get in the cup. You drop it in there, you pick up the tiny little spoon, and you stir. But only once. You aren't allowed to do it more than once. You put the little spoon down, and then you sip, but you can only take a *tiny* sip. That's English. Not me. In Russia we have bread in one hand and a big bowl of soup in the other."

[2] Mason's sources seem reliable, but one should remain alert. Lucia Davidova, described as "a close friend of Balanchine for many years," quotes Mr. B. as saying to her, about Suzanne Farrell, "I introduce her to Stravinsky and Tchelitchew and other people, yet I'm fully aware that she'd rather chat with her girlfriends from the Ballet School about nothing." Since Tchelitchew died in 1957 (and spent a good year out of the United States before that), when Suzanne Farrell was twelve, at most, it seems highly unlikely that Balanchine ever introduced them, especially as I am pretty sure that Suzanne Farrell wasn't even at the School of American Ballet in those years.

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Such vivid imagery, used to characterize the abstraction of movement, was typical of Balanchine. It's a constant in the recollections Mason has elicited, along with comments about the apparently effortless way he went about making dances, at once highly intuitive and intensely pragmatic. Balanchine's extraordinary ability to move expressively, even at an advanced age, is another recurring theme. (Tallchief has said, "I used to think—if I could only dance *Swan Lake* the way George did it.") So is the deep physical pleasure of performing Balanchine's choreography, the speed demanded of his dancers, and the peculiarity of his teaching. Helgi Tomasson, a Danish-trained principal with the company at the same time as Duell, describes Balanchine's classes graphically: "Balanchine never articulated his philosophy of dance in words. He expected you to understand it over time and by watching him demonstrate in movement. Much of it was in his classes, how he wanted you to execute certain steps. He would devote one class, two classes, to certain steps, sometimes to one particular step. You might be aching and wanting to get out of there, you couldn't stand it any more, but it sank in." (That photograph of Balanchine demonstrating with hand and foot, used in the ads for the Celebration, was intensely evocative of the millions of *tendus* he imposed in his effort to get us to "present the foot.")

A composite portrait gradually emerges, through stories of unexpected generosity and petty (and not so petty) cruelties, and affectionate (and sometimes not so affectionate) comments on Balanchine's periodic enchantment with various women dancers, the celebrated "muses," some of whom he married, who inspired his invention. The only thing everyone seems to agree upon is Mr. B.'s refusal to be consistent. On this (and on much more), Betty Cage, the NYCB's administrator from 1947 to 1985, is informative and perceptive. ". . . he was a most inconsistent person, even in his teaching. What he taught one day was not necessarily what he taught the following year," Cage says. "Over the years Balanchine changed. In his professional career he went through periods and phases much as Picasso did. And as a person he was not stagnant. He was not the same man when he was seventy that he was when he was forty-five. His personal happiness was wrapped up in the well-being of the company and also in the careers of individual dancers. By turning dancers into more than they thought they could be and what he hoped they would be, he created them. That was his greatest pleasure, and that didn't change. He went through all his life being interested in and inspired by different dancers."

There is a popular conception of the kind of dancer this was: long-limbed, slender, with what he called "bird-bones," strong, fast, deeply musical, and committed to his dictum of "Don't think, just do." Yet Balanchine was paradoxical in his tastes in dancers, as in anything else. Pat McBride, a pioneer member of Ballet Society, the NYCB's first incarnation, and a member of the NYCB in its early days, points

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out: "Suzanne Farrell could never do any of the really difficult technical roles. She couldn't dance like Merrill Ashley, technically. And there is no doubt which was his muse."

The combination of interest and inspiration, added to Balanchine's willingness to experiment, led him to alter his choreography over the years, adapting his ballets to the strengths and particular gifts of whoever was dancing them at the time. This has sometimes provoked controversy about authenticity, and recurring comments from many of the dancers interviewed by Mason about things being lost or abandoned. Yet as Kent Stowell, a soloist during the 1960s, reminds us, reasonably, ". . . every generation of dancers in the New York City Ballet's history feels that its version was the only version . . . Everyone ought to have enough wisdom to recognize that part of the legacy of Balanchine's ballets is that they were ever changing."

It would be nice to give the last word to Balanchine himself, but he distrusted books on dance. "Either they oversimplify the art so that it seems an amusing game, or they overcomplicate it so that it becomes a sacred mystery," he wrote in 1951. A remark of Betty Cage could, however, stand as a wistful summary of both Mason's book and the Celebration: "I don't think there is a definitive portrait of Balanchine. Everybody has a different view, a different perspective. Probably they are all true in certain ways and all lacking in certain ways. We have the ballets, of course, but I think it's true that they may never be danced the way they were when he was doing them."

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BERT CARDULLO

Dancin'

LEAVING ASIDE MUSICALS like *Grease* (1978) and *Hair* (1979) together with ballet films such as *The Turning Point* (1977) and *Blood Wedding* (1981), there have been two types of dance movies over the past fifteen years or so: the fast-dance film, which emphasizes the liberating spontaneity and physicality, if not sexuality, of the dance floor (e.g., *Saturday Night Fever* [1977], *Flashdance* [1983], and *Dirty Dancing* [1987]); and its opposite number, the ballroom-dance film, which highlights the restraint, elegance, and stylization—the *structure*—to be found in ballroom dancing, a tradition untarnished by displays of cheap emotion and obvious sensuality. The one dance relieves the protagonist of his inhibitions and thus frees him from the numbing routine of daily (working) life, the other restores those inhibitions at the same time that it replaces the routine of everyday life with another, far more pleasurable, even less deviating one. *Roseland* (1977) is an example of the latter kind of movie, as is the recent *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), but both are topped by the Mexican film *Danzón*, which I'd like to discuss here.

Danzón is the second feature to be directed by María Novaro, who began her career in the 1980s as a member of the Cine Mujer collective, and who joins her countryman and fellow director Jaime Humberto Hermosillo in her desire to make films that contemplate the *macho*-dominated culture of Mexico—she from the feminine perspective (not feminist, she insists), he from the homosexual one, as in *Doña Herlinda and Her Son* (1986). The *danzón*, loosely translated as "refined ballroom dance," is simple in nature: each partner concentrates on completing a perfect square of steps, making eye contact only fleetingly in what amounts to a pantomime of courtship, of male pursuit and female coquetry. The *danzón* is danced to sentimental ballads in the *salones de baile* (dance halls) of Mexico, where a largely working-class clientele gathers to display dance steps that have remained unchanged for generations, amid shimmering light and flashy décor that evoke the era of the forties and fifties. Her passion for the *danzón* takes Julia Solorzano to the Colonia dance hall in Mexico City, where she has been meeting her partner Carmelo Benítez twice a week for the past ten years. Julia is a fortyish divorcée and telephone operator who lives alone with her teenaged daughter, Perla, herself newly employed alongside her mother at the phone company. To Julia, "dancing is the most important thing in life,"

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which helps explain why she knows little about Carmelo beyond the fact that he's a cook who hails from Veracruz and who, she thinks, is unmarried. This tall, courtly, mustachioed man of fifty is an excellent dancer with whom Julia has won several competitions, and dancing is all that they do, or care to do, together. Their romance takes place within the comfortable circumscription of the dance floor—nowhere else—and hence is both never-ending and ideal.

But one night Carmelo fails to turn up at the Colonia, then continues to miss his and Julia's semiweekly "dates." She seeks him in vain at his place of employment and at dance halls other than the Colonia; when she hears that he has been accused of theft from the restaurant where he works, and, although cleared, has fled the capital for Veracruz, Julia resolves to take time off from her job and travel to the seaport town in search of him. This is the first time she will have taken a long trip alone anywhere, without her daughter, her best friend Silvia, or any of her other girlfriends, for that matter: *that's* how important her dancing partner is to her. Carmelo certainly can't be replaced by Perla, with whom Julia forlornly dances in the living room of their apartment, nor can he be replaced by the younger men who ask her to dance, and whom she refuses, at the club "Los Angeles," where Julia's friends have taken her in a last-ditch effort to revive her spirits.

The first shot of Julia as she descends the train in Veracruz is of her high heels, and the camera isolates her feet on at least two other occasions during her sojourn; the first shot of *Danzón* was of those same high heels, immediately joined by Carmelo's dancing shoes. Julia fails to reunite with her partner in his hometown—he may have fled here or fled *from* here by ship, or he may not have—but the company she does keep during her odyssey in this appealing port city is a revelation to her, about the world outside the delicate bounds of the *danzón* as well as about herself. Upon checking into the cheap Hotel Rex, she takes one of her numerous strolls around the town in quest of Carmelo—past cafés and outdoor bandstands, into clubs and restaurants, down to the docks and over to the seaside—and it is clear at once that a kind of change has come over Julia. In the first place, she dresses and makes herself up more attractively, more brightly, which gets the attention of one man after another on the street, which in turn causes her to smile a lot. No small part of her new sexual allure is the changed environment in which she finds herself: the softer, cleaner, warmer air of sunny Veracruz, where she is able to spend much of her time outdoors, as opposed to the thicker, dirtier, muggier air of sallow Mexico City, where she spends her days indoors at the phone-company switchboard and seeks haven by night in the dance halls that dot the shoddy, neon-lit neighborhoods of the nation's capital. (The cinematographer Rodrigo Garcia unobtrusively captures the different look of these two cities, as he does of each's juxtaposed locales: the institutional telephone company and the

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Julia (María Rojo) and Carmelo (Daniel Rergis) dancing at the Colonia in "Danzón"

Photo credit: Courtesy of British Film Institute Stills, Posters and Designs

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colorful dance hall, the dingy hotel and the lucent oceanside.) But something else is also responsible for Julia's transformation, despite the fact that she cannot find Carmelo, and that is her temporary sense of freedom, of leisure, which gives her the chance to meet people and do things shut off from her by the routine of her life in Mexico City.

Her first encounter is with the cynical yet singing proprietress of the Hotel Rex, Doña Ti, who, along with the prostitutes in residence, becomes Julia's confidante. Doña Ti (whose husband, if she still has one, is nowhere to be found) complains that her six offspring never come to visit her, which contradicts the myth of Latin mother-worship; while the prostitute "La Colorada" is torn between her work and the two small children who demand her attention, between bondage to her pimp and the bonds of family. The transvestite Susy is no prostitute but rather a cabaret artist who performs to an audience of appreciative men—which is its own comment on Mexican *machismo*—and who, along with his fellow transvestite Karla, befriends Julia in her efforts to find her man (and assists her in enhancing her appearance!). She, in turn, tries to teach Susy the *danzón* but is hampered by his plea that she teach him the woman's part, that she lead and hold him like a man. To Susy's disappointment, Julia responds that the dancing couple must be a complementary, aesthetic whole: a man and a woman; that in the *danzón*, the man leads and the woman follows. She might have added that the man is older and the woman younger, but for the fact that she will soon reverse herself and become involved with a younger man named Rubén.

This handsome buck works on a tugboat whose romantically fatalistic name, *See Me and Suffer*, is matched by those of the ships around it in the harbor of Veracruz: *L'amour fou, Pure Illusions, Lost Love, Black Tears*. But Rubén isn't much of a dancer and, though she has sex with him (offscreen) and extends her stay a week on his account, though he seems genuinely interested in her despite the difference in their ages, Julia finally leaves him as well as her other new acquaintances to return to Mexico City. She has given up her hunt for Carmelo, she won't suffer love with a man almost young enough to be her son, and she has had enough of prostitutes who would be mothers, mothers who have been abandoned by their children, and men who would be women. Paradoxically, these queer types have helped her to appreciate her own worth and attractiveness at the same time that the messiness, even grotesqueness, of their lives, of modern life outside the aesthetically perfect squares of the *danzón*, has driven her away from them.

Back in the capital, a fresh and relaxed Julia, sporting flowers in her hair and gifts in her bag, hosts some friends at her apartment. Afterwards, they all head to the Colonia, along with Perla, where the bandleader himself greets the returned Julia and dedicates the next *danzón* to her. In the middle of this dance, Carmelo, well-tanned and impeccably dressed in a white suit and hat, suddenly appears and cuts

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in on Julia's partner; then, without exchanging a word, they start to dance, pausing for a moment—in violation of the *danzón*'s strict rules—to look deeply into each other's eyes. The camera has moved from a full shot of the couple to a close-up of their faces, and it is on a long take of this close-up that the film ends. *Danzón* has lived by the long take, usually of shots in the medium-to-full range, and by the traveling camera, as befits a film about ballroom dancing, about the uniting of couples in continuous, graceful, gliding movement.

Julia and Carmelo have reunited at the end of *Danzón*, without any explanation on his part for either his disappearance or reappearance, without any questions from her, and with no more than the suggestion that they will extend their relationship beyond the perimeters of the *danzón*. They haven't once kissed, let alone had sex, during the film, and they don't now. Perhaps both have summoned the courage, as a result of their separate odysseys (and *Danzón* is a "feminine" film in the sense that it concentrates on Julia's spiritual odyssey, not on Carmelo's action-adventure), to take their romance from the level of the ideal to the real, to "complicate" it in a way that their lives outside the *danzón* have been complicated. Perhaps not. What is certain is that Julia and Carmelo each long for an earlier, more chivalrous era when men led and women followed—when men were more protective, indeed worshipful, of their women and women were more dependent on their men—even if they know that such a relationship between the sexes is no longer possible anywhere but on the dance floor.

So *Danzón* looks back nostalgically (but not sentimentally) to a time when life seemed simpler, roles seemed better defined, people appeared happier; in other words, to a time when Latin-American *machismo* was considered to be at its zenith. For this the feminists among us have charged the movie with being "retrogressive," despite its warmth, subtlety, and evenhandedness. These cheerless scolds prefer such state-approved, "educational" films out of Cuba as *Lucia* (1969), about three women named Lucia, each from a different social class and each separated by a generation, who resist the restrictiveness of the female role in a *macho* society; *Portrait of Teresa* (1979), about a textile worker and mother of three who resolves to make a life of her own apart from her selfish, philandering husband; and *Up to a Point* (1983), about a writer researching a documentary about *machismo* who learns that he is as much trapped in traditional notions of maleness as the dockworkers whom he interviews.[1] The trouble with these three films is not that their critique of *machismo* is wrong, but that it is one-sided and therefore less knowing, less rich, less humane. It is also humorless, as *Danzón*'s contemplation of *machismo* is not: witness in particular the manner in which the movie simultaneously makes fun of *macho* posturing *and* homosexual camp through the character of

[1] One aspect of the reconstruction of post-revolutionary Cuba was legislation for sexual equality, whose merit was to be promulgated in part through the cinema.

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Susy, who nonetheless winds up being the most sympathetic of *Danzón*'s characters next to Julia.

One reason for this, aside from the sensitive screenplay by Novaro and her sister Beatriz, is the naturalistic acting of Tito Vasconcelos in the role. Not "realistic," which implies a skimming of life's surface, an imitation of merely superficial behavior, but "naturalistic," which suggests a probing of life's depths, an assimilation of character to its (unconscious) core. Realistic acting can be found in many films, where it is often mistaken for the genuine article; naturalistic acting, in few, where it frequently goes unnoticed. For an example of what I mean, see the scene where Vasconcelos and María Rojo, resplendent as Julia, meet for the first time[2]: he in search of female companionship, she on the lookout for Carmelo; he with a desperate need to be needed, she with a need for someone to look out for her; both characters with a woman's intuitive grasp of the other's predicament as well as open-heartedness.

The acting in Aki Kaurismäki's *The Match Factory Girl*, as in all of this young Finnish director's films to date,[3] seems superficial but it is not. His characters tend to lead dead-end existences that have naturally deadened their spirits, and they are not offered emotional outlets like the *danzón*. Playing such characters, as Kati Outinen sympathetically has done first in Kaurismäki's *Hamlet Goes to Business* (1987) and now in *The Match Factory Girl*, may appear easy but is in fact difficult, for it requires intense concentration, the subtlest of suggestion, and rigorous self-control, even self-denial. In other words, such acting calls for far more than simply "doing nothing," and all the more so, paradoxically, in a film where the characters talk so little. Not a word is spoken by them for the first fifteen or twenty minutes, and for the rest of this seventy-minute movie, which includes a number of accentuating long takes, conversation is limited to brief utterances or fleeting exchanges (the longest of which occurs in a letter the heroine "writes" in voice-over). Indeed, most of the speech we hear comes, not from the characters, but from the televisions and movie screens they watch together with the radios and jukeboxes they listen to. These are people who not only are isolated within the frame, even when they occupy it along with someone else, but whose bodies are also occasionally fragmented by the frame into anonymous hands or torsos, and who are regularly excluded from it altogether!

[2] Among the other members of *Danzón*'s ensemble cast: Carmen Salinas as Doña Ti, Daniel Rergis as Carmelo, Margarita Isabel as Silvia, Adyari Chazaro as Perla, Victor Carpinteiro as Rubén, Blanca Guerra as "La Colorada," and Sergio Colmenares as Karla.

[3] Kaurismäki has made approximately ten films, each with a screenplay by him. His very latest is *La Vie de Bohème*, about which I hope to write in a future chronicle. In his productivity and presence, Aki Kaurismäki may become to his generation of Finnish filmmakers what Jörn Donner was to the previous one.

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This occurs during "dead time"—when the camera photographs an empty room or street, prior to a character's entrance into the frame, or holds on a location after the character has departed—which Kaurismäki uses in this film, often before as well as after the same scene, more than in any of his others, and more than any director in recent memory with the exception of Jim Jarmusch.[4] Unlike Ozu, Antonioni, Bresson, and lately Jarmusch, Kaurismäki uses "dead time" less as an anti-"action" device—as a way of making his fiction give up some of its screen-time to the world from which it was drawn, for the purpose of calling attention to the mystery, inviolability, and ultimate stasis of that world—than as an anti-human one. That is, so insistent is his use of "dead time" (at least once substituting it for nearly an entire sequence: the opening one depicting the mechanized matchbox factory) that he seems intent, not only on registering the sublime indifference of the physical world to the problems and needs of his characters, but also on positing this peopleless world as a comically serene alternative to the one defiled by human cruelty, imperfection, and torpor.

The Match Factory Girl is the third film of a loose trilogy, including *Shadows in Paradise* (1986) and *Ariel* (1988), that chronicles the down-and-dirty, dour, dull existence of the Finnish working class. Kaurismäki's minimalistic style in these films, in which he shoots one action, one emotion, one *inaction* at a time and limits his focus to a small cast of characters, fits the pared-down lives of his subjects. But it is his darkly comic or subversively hilarious tone that, more than anything else, has drawn attention to the trilogy and that, combined with his minimalism, lands him somewhere between Robert Bresson and Buster Keaton, as one critic aptly put it. Kaurismäki definitely doesn't glamorize his workers by planting them in heroic plots (as Martin Ritt did in *Norma Rae* [1979]), but neither does he portray them as the pathetic victims of an oppressive socioeconomic system (as Lars Forsberg did in *The Yankee* [1970]). What he does do is use humor as a defensive, mocking response to the bleakness of a particular type of human existence: that of the bare economic integer, the average worker, in a society defined by averageness. And he complements that humor with stationary camera placements, mostly in the medium-to-full range, that keep us somewhat at a distance from the characters. His purpose is neither to make the proletarian life seem more courageous nor more miserable than it really is, but rather to get us to think about just what constitutes such a life, and to get his characters to collaborate, not in their own ridicule, but in their liberation from a ridiculous existence. Theirs is a life without hope, without horizons, without contest or contrast, and Kaurismäki finds

[4] Jarmusch acted in Kaurismäki's *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* (1989) and shot one of the five parts of his own (disappointing) *Night on Earth* (1991) in Helsinki.

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them precisely at the moment when they are consciously or subconsciously waking up to this fact.

Iris (Kati Outinen) is the match factory girl, except that she is no longer a girl. Rather, she is a woman in her late twenties or early thirties who lives with her mother (Elina Salo) and stepfather (Esko Nikkari) and appears to be their primary, if not sole, support. Iris works at a drab match factory in Helsinki, where the only color seems to come from the matchboxes, and where her only job is to make sure that their labels are firmly attached as they roll past her on the assembly line. Her life outside the factory is just as monotonous as her life inside it (as her home address, 44 Factory Lane, suggests): she cooks, she cleans, she reads, she sleeps. This is a woman who is washed out, in look and outlook, and whose wanness is matched by Timo Salminen's cinematography, which seems to drain the light from each scene despite the fact that the film takes place in June or July (when Helsinki receives its annual ration of sun).

Iris is ready for a change, however, which she decides to effect one night by buying a bright red dress and going dancing, much to her parents' disapproval. (The first line of dialogue in *The Match Factory Girl* is spoken by Iris' stepfather, who calls his stepdaughter a whore and slaps her upon discovering the dress—and the missing money from her pay envelope.) Dancing for her is a means to an end, not an end in itself, as it was for Julia Solorzano, and that end is finding a man. Iris finds Aarne (Vesa Vierikko), a sleek businessman with a sports car and posh apartment, who promptly takes her to bed and leaves her some money in the morning. She leaves him her phone number, not realizing that this womanizer has no intention of seeing her again. When Aarne doesn't call, the worried Iris—who has just passed another birthday—marches to his place and more or less coerces him into another date, after which he dumps her outright. By this time she's pregnant, in response to which her parents kick her out of the house and Aarne mails her a check for an abortion, even though she has expressed a desire to keep the child as well as him. The mortified Iris then goes to live with her brother, who may offer her shelter but nothing in the way of consolation: not a word or a hug, nor even his mere presence together with her in the same apartment. It is here, alone in a living room dominated by a jukebox and a pool table, that Iris decides to take her revenge on humanity.

Her first step is to buy rat poison at the drugstore, in a dryly humorous scene that belies the desperateness of her design. "Large or small?" asks the clerk, as if her customer were purchasing a medication instead of a toxin. "What does it do?" inquires Iris, trying to gauge how much of the substance she'll need to accomplish her mission. "It kills," responds the slightly incredulous clerk. The match factory girl's first victim is, of course, Aarne, to whom she returns his check before methodically dispatching him by pouring rat poison into his drink. Predictably, Aarne is in another room of his apartment

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when Iris does this. Unpredictably, and therefore comically, she poisons her next victim—an anonymous man who comes on to her at a bar—as he sits next to her and watches. He thinks she's spiking his drink; she knows she's murdering him. Both smile. Iris' last stop is her parents' house, where her mother lets her in and the daughter begins dutifully fixing supper as she always has. Except that this time she pours rat poison into the water pitcher. Iris sits, smoking, in the living room as her mother and father dine in the kitchen; we watch her, in a long take, not her victims. We don't even see them drink their poisoned water, as we have seen Aarne and the bar patron drink their cocktails. Moreover, we do not observe any of Iris' prey in their death throes, for such a scene, if serious, would disturb *The Match Factory Girl*'s wryly humorous tone by creating sympathy for the victims, and if comic would send the film into the savagely satirical realm of a Monty Python movie.

To be sure, *The Match Factory Girl* has its savage, even nihilistic side, but that side is kept in check, for Kaurismäki's intent is not to sacrifice the humanity of Iris or his other characters to his vision of a mad, cruel world. Instead, he aims to document Iris' sacrificing of her *own* humanity to such a world, her decision to match its casual inhumanity with her own, deliberate inhumaneness—to go her society one better, in other words, by going it one worse. And it is the memory of her *self*-sacrifice that we take away from this film, not the sacrifice of her victims, not her victimization by an exploitative patriarchy, not her droll manipulation by a Kaurismäki set on taking his own revenge against the numbing, morose sameness of life lived without the possibility of enrichment or escape. By her homicidal acts, Iris has chosen to live the rest of her life in a literal prison instead of a figurative one, and the last scene of *The Match Factory Girl*—shot in deep focus, with no cutting—shows her silently being removed from her place of employment by the police. They enter at the top of the frame, Iris labors at the bottom; after she's gone, the camera continues to hold on the same space as another worker busies himself in the background. On the soundtrack we hear the same kind of saccharine love song that Iris has listened to alone throughout the film—in cafés and bars, at home and at work—and that seems to have influenced her idealized conception of romance.

Unlike Julia, Iris isn't dancing with anyone at the end of *The Match Factory Girl.* Aarne is dead and was keener for sex than dancing, anyway. She has desired the sociability of dance and the intimacy of romance, but instead has met first with objectification and then rejection, even by her parents. Part of the problem is Iris' plainness bordering on unattractiveness, but there can be little question that what happened to her could easily happen to a more appealing woman. Iris' looks clearly exacerbate her situation, but they are not its cause. We must look for that to the drudgery of her working as well as family life, and also to the remoteness, even solitude, of the Finns

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(especially the men) as compared with the Mexicans, which has something to do with their severe climate but more, I suspect, with their fuzzy (inter)national identity.[5] All of this is small comfort to Iris, who can now look forward to her own life of solitude behind bars—at least until her baby is born, at which time the authorities will have to decide whether to grant her clemency or separate this mother irrevocably from her child, and thus even further from her fellow human beings.

[5] Finland was a part of Sweden until 1809 and an autonomous Grand Duchy within Czarist Russia from 1809 to 1917. In other words, for generations the Finns existed under the political dominance of the Russians and in the cultural shadow of the Swedes. Since 1917, the country has been an independent republic dividing its allegiance between Europe and Scandinavia (and even the United States!), and slowly developing its culture and economy. During World War II, Finland—unbeknownst to many—was more or less allied with Nazi Germany, which it permitted to use its northern territory (called Lapland) as a staging ground for military operations against Russia. As for the recent characterization of the country as "Tango-Finland" on American television—a nation of silent citizens who do their "talking" on the dance floor—I can only say, after numerous visits to my wife's native land, that the dancing side of the Finnish national character is greatly exaggerated. The *tanssilavat* are not urban dance *halls* but rural dance *platforms*, which means that they are confined to the outdoors, which further means that their use is limited to special occasions during the summer months. These are chiefly occasions for excessive drinking, as I recall, not for decorous dancing.

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JOHN LOUGHERY

The Big Picture

THERE ARE TWO WAYS TO REACT to a large-scale survey show on the order of "Latin-American Artists of the Twentieth Century" at the Museum of Modern Art. On the one hand, plain gratitude seems appropriate; the chance to savor paintings one has read about but never seen or to encounter a new name and several well-chosen examples of that artist's work—this is why people who love paintings and sculpture go to museums. A gallery with several choice pictures each by Frida Kahlo and Maria Izquierdo or a corridor devoted to the Surrealism of Tarsila do Amaral and Alejandro Xul Sular or a good example of the bravura technique of Arnaldo Roche Rabell's leaf paintings: what is to complain about in that? This is mastery of craft taken to a high visionary level. On the other hand, the hit-or-miss experiential aspect of a museum show this broad can be pretty unsatisfying. Everyone who attends such exhibitions isn't in need of an expensive visual primer, some sort of vast, happy-go-lucky introduction to the field. What's also wanted is a focus and new insights or intellectual provocation, an *idea* about the subject as much as an aesthetic barrage. Imagine a museum survey entitled "European Painting in the Twentieth Century." Who for one minute would expect anything coherent out of the hodgepodge that would necessarily result? A single show that demonstrated the principles and accomplishments of Fauvism, Cubism, Surrealism, Expressionism, Malevich and all the other Russians, late Picasso and early Balthus, Anselm Kiefer and Lucian Freud? Not to mention the Camden Town group, *l'art brut*, CoBRA, Francis Bacon, the painting being done in Scandinavia and Ireland, in postwar Spain and Italy. You get the drift: we'd have a costly, sumptuous, pointless mess.

So why is a similar romp through nine decades and a continent of over thirty countries any more useful? Perhaps one point to this exhibition was to foster an impression of the cosmopolitan character of painting south of our borders, to emphasize the fact that Latin-American artists had a highly developed knowledge of European Modernism equal to our own and at as early a date. If that was the idea, it's not a terrible one. Not so long ago, modern literature to Americans automatically meant Barth and Bellow, certainly not Allende, Paz, Puig, or Arenas. The deft Cubism of Diego Rivera matches the achievements of Braque and Gris; Matta takes a place in the same temple of the unconscious where Ernst and Miró reside; we

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are reminded that a number of Argentine artists in the 1940s were creating geometric abstractions as sleek and pure as those of any Bauhaus graduate. But, naturally, such parallels can't be the beginning and the end of the matter, either, or we will find ourselves patting some very talented men and women on the back for knowing their place as Europeans *manqués*. So enough has to be made of what is distinctively Latin American about these artists: Torres-García's pre-Columbian symbolism, Rivera's *Zapata*, the jungles of Wilfredo Lam, the anti-clerical, anti-junta parodies of Fernando Botero. The difficulty of assimilating both notions at the same time is that they embody contradictory impulses in an annoyingly well-intentioned way. Anyone who saw the exhibition "The Art of the Fantastic: Latin America, 1920–1987" five years ago (it made a three-museum tour, including a stop at the Queens Museum in New York) has a point of comparison. By sticking to one angle—the earlier show explored the element of fantasy and hyperbole in Latin-American art, whatever was dynamic and extreme in that painting—the curators saw to it that more was said, more was learned, and more interesting artists were coherently grouped together than it is possible to do in what the Museum of Modern Art has attempted. One came away thinking that people like Roberto Aizenberg, Siron Franco, Alejandro Colunga, and José Bedia Valdés were both connected intellectually to the mainstream *and at the same time* were doing something original, all their own, born of experience that might be uniquely Mexican or Cuban or whatever. The summer exhibition at MoMA resembled nothing so much as its own reopening show in 1984 when the wildest mishmash of contemporary artists was heaved together in the overcrowded, low-ceilinged special exhibition galleries.

Not that motifs didn't eventually emerge. Social consciousness—anger, moral indignation—was bountifully in evidence in this show, so much so in fact that I kept thinking that here was a topic that would have been a good one to pursue by itself. American artists are notoriously bad at merging art and politics; the one invariably suffocates the other. Yet that doesn't happen when Botero directs our attention to his bloated *dramatis personae* or when Jacobo Borges paints his faceless men of power in gorgeous and menacing colors. David Alfaro Siqueiros' *Echo of a Scream* displays an emotional fierceness and a skill as potent as José Clemente Orozco's battle-weary men in *Barricade*. Candido Portinari's laborers in the coffee fields make a point without beating us over the head, and Antonio Berni's monumental *Unemployed*, a complex tempera-on-burlap, manages to do the hardest thing of all—to occupy our attention with how this fine painting is made at the same instant that we reflect on the human sadness the artist has portrayed. Avoiding didacticism and never losing sight of craft over message (or the reverse), these are artists Americans have something to learn from, on more than one level.

"A false and dangerous concept" is how the Brazilian novelist Jorge

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Amado has described the very idea of a Latin-American literature. "There is nothing more different," he once wrote, "than a Mexican and a Brazilian . . . we are simply united by what is negative—misery, oppression, military dictatorship." Those were sentiments in the back of my mind at MoMA this summer, and if we aren't to have exhibitions focusing simply (and separately) on Brazilian painting or Mexican painting, then the next time around let's go for the negative: a clever, profound art that examines oppression and tyranny. Because no one has done that better than Siqueiros, Orozco, Portinari, Berni, Borges, Botero, et al.

Two exhibitions this year that did manage to convey "the big picture"—i.e., that were not especially narrow or overly specialized while still having an idea, or a definite thread to follow—were the huge American watercolor show at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts and the early Pop Art show at the Whitney Museum of American Art.

"Awash in Color" was drawn almost entirely from the superb watercolor collection of the MFA itself, which is a fact worth noting at the outset. (The point being that too many museums, in their desire to get the juicy traveling loan shows, do not make enough use of their own vast collections.) We saw several galleries filled with the best examples of a notoriously difficult medium and were quietly instructed in the evolution of an art form and in the evolution of public perception of that art form. In the beginning, watercolor was seen as a minor category, suitable for women in their spare time and for documentary purposes. Both restrictions seem especially bizarre to us today, as there is nothing inherently easier about getting watery masses of color to go where you want them to on paper than there is in getting oil paint spread across canvas. And the first, historically fascinating rooms in the show were devoted to that sense of watercolor as a "tight" rather than a fluid medium, a junior-version of oil painting in which a detailed realistic picture is "colored in," in effect. The sheer skill displayed by these lesser known artists necessarily won, in time, a better reputation for their art form. Watercolor societies proliferated. More attention was paid. Then, as in so many areas of life, a gradual momentum is abruptly accelerated when genius comes into play, and the middle galleries devoted to the American titans of watercolor—Winslow Homer, John Singer Sargent, and John LaFarge (in truth, LaFarge barely holds his own in company with Homer and Sargent, but the slant of the MFA collection would have it otherwise)—firmly establish the medium as one to be reckoned with, a bona fide "masculine" endeavor, by the 1880s. What Homer could do with watercolor in his landscapes and what Sargent could do with his architecture and figures is not surpassed by anything they, or anyone else, did with oil, pencil, or chalk. The last large gallery in Boston was concerned with the remarkable use American Modernists made of watercolor, showing that the tools of an allegedly genteel

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form of expression could be turned to the most rigorous, dynamic, personally expressive *modern* ends. After John Marin's versions of a rocky, wind-swept coastline—recreating the rough, bracing *feel* of the site rather than a precise copy of it—or Charles Demuth's keyed-up figures and psychologically charged spaces (Jazz Age night spots, Zola boudoirs), there wasn't room for doubt that it is the flair of the artist, and not any supposed limitations of the medium, that counts in the end. A valuable idea in the form of a dazzling exhibition.

The traditional view of Pop Art is that of a "bad boy" movement that represented a complete—a rude—break with the dominant school of painting that came before, that is, the heady, gestural, pigment-obsessed, art-for-psyche's-sake world of Abstract Expressionism. This is a perspective that has always made sense. From the spiritual metaphors of Mark Rothko to Andy Warhol's Brillo boxes, from Clyfford Still's version of The Sublime to Tom Wesselman's irreverent Great American Nudes and Jim Dine's in-your-face idea of still-life, is a distance that feels like a rupture, not an evolution.

An interesting midyear show at the Whitney, "Hand-Painted Pop: American Art in Transition, 1955–1962," explored the thesis that there was a period of overlap, a time in the 1950s and very early 1960s when the Pop Artists were still as taken with paint as they were with those new icons of American life, the mass-produced products and emblems of a crazed consumer culture, or with sassiness in general. The evidence on display that makes this case believable are the early Warhol pieces like *Two Heads* (1952–1957) and *Icebox* (1960), in which the man who wanted to be a machine was as yet unafraid of drips of paint and other evidences of a human mind and heart at work. Ed Ruscha fits the same bill. In *Actual Size* (1962), his homage to a can of "Spam," we have an artist who is equally interested in rambunctious picture-making and in assaying a droll point about a truly weird feature of twentieth-century life. Jasper Johns is possibly the best example of someone who never abandoned painterly effects, though a case could be made for not labeling him a mere "Pop Artist" at all, while Claes Oldenburg's paint-and-enamel wall pieces—three-dimensional articles of clothing—are definitely in the crossroads of the two seemingly antithetical movements. The smartest aspect of the exhibition was the inclusion of those artists one doesn't normally think of when discussing Pop Art in its early years, e.g., Mel Ramos, Peter Saul, and Wayne Thiebaud. Ramos' portrait of Superman and Thiebaud's icing-covered cakes are certainly making use of Pop Art motifs, but the careful, lively, paint-saturated way in which those images are treated does speak for a view of Pop as not entirely indifferent to the effect of thick pigment and sensuous color on canvas.

One problem with this show, though, was the appearance of too many works that didn't uphold its premise or seemed not to be close enough to what we think of as the spirit of Pop Art. Rosenquist's *The*

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President-Elect (1961), a large painting of the smiling face of JFK, some good spongy cake, and a new car, is a classic of the style, and it doesn't prove any link whatsoever to Abstract Expressionism. It isn't "transitional." It's already there, on the other side. Rosenquist's paint is thin, flat, neat, and untextured compared to what we are assuming is meant by "painterly" à la Grace Hartigan's *Billboard* (1957) or Larry Rivers' *The Accident* (1957). In fact, most of the Rosenquists at the Whitney, like most of the Roy Lichtensteins, don't suggest an interest in traces of arduous "hand painting." So why are they on the walls in this context? Then there is that Grace Hartigan and that Larry Rivers, which are indeed about frenzies of paint—but seem only tangentially about Pop issues. Likewise, Oldenburg's self-portrait, which is very much about self and painting (it is dated 1959) and not at all about consumerism, mass taste, pop culture. So, we have a little muddle here.

Perhaps the largest problem is the risk that any exhibition dealing with Pop Art runs if it fails to include (as this show would have to, given its theme of "early" Pop) enough of the "masterpieces"—what a word in this context—of the style. The result inevitably makes Pop Art seem even more mundane and limited than it really is. Still, kudos to the Whitney for a purposeful, focused study of an art movement that tends to be viewed as an unambiguous monolith. Indeed, this was a particularly good summer for the museum, with the huge well-installed survey of the "Fluxus" movement occupying another floor of the building and a splendid use of the lobby gallery for a concentrated look at Edward Hopper's lush, little-known Paris paintings of 1906–1910. Now, if someone could tell me why the powers-that-be have removed every last bench and couch from the place this year, rendering it impossible to spend any great length of time in one room, I'll be happy.

If you wanted to have in one day as complete a view of what is going on in the art world of the 1990s—which is to say, if you wanted to know the defining parameters of that chaotic realm—you could hardly do better than to spend a morning at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's brand-new nineteenth-century French rooms followed by a trip to and a stroll down (yes, indeed) 42nd Street between Times Square and Eighth Avenue. From the museum experience par excellence to "the museum without walls" that has been handed over for the moment to a corps of urban Conceptual artists: that is the biggest picture of all.

At the Met: the philanthropic bidding war for Walter Annenberg's collection of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist masterworks was won by the Big Apple. Curators in Philadelphia and Los Angeles gnashed their teeth. "I believe in strength going to strength," Annenberg remarked at the time. The deal meant that the Andre Meyer wing of French art, a "space" never much loved but only a few years

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old, would be redone top to bottom, so as to set aside the Annenberg paintings in their own more hospitable domain. (There were those of us who wondered at the time if the Met really needed these paintings, given that it has the Havemeyer and the Meyer collections, and needed to spend all that money to accommodate them when some of its other holdings, such as the twentieth-century collection, are so spotty, but that is another story.) To no one's surprise, the new rooms are spectacular—just what they should have been in the first place. Gone are the movable walls and the tacky wooden benches and the whole feel of a harshly lighted "space." We have now large and elegant "rooms," and an installation of the art that does much better by painters like Corot and Courbet who used to be relegated to corridor and back-gallery status. Salon painting is still featured here, mixing some absolute stinkers like Cot's *The Storm* and some dreary Cabanel nudes with perfectly respectable pictures like Arnold Böcklin's *Island of the Dead*. (As a teenager I was given the Met's series of art-education booklets that—I clearly remember—informed us in no uncertain terms that *The Storm* was Bad Art. Is no one reading these booklets any more?) But two entire rooms devoted to Monet alone, a separate Romanticism gallery, a wondrous little room just for Degas' sculpture, the Annenbergs' Van Gogh *Woman Rocking a Cradle*, the original wooden floor properly restored to the light of day, and a thick wainscoting in many of the rooms that adds the right nineteenth-century touch: the whole enterprise has been so lavishly and sensitively done that even hardened skeptics (those of us who hate watching museums with already fine collections salivating for more of the "blue chip" stock when less glamorous art is ignored) will be seduced. These rooms and the paintings on the walls establish this museum for all time as *the* place in America for anyone to come to learn of the greatness of an art form in the time of Ingres through Cézanne. A triumph of good design, connoisseurship, and lots and lots of money.

Forty blocks downtown: we are indeed living in a period of change. For all of my time in New York, which is the last two decades, the Times Square area has been synonymous with pimps, pushers, hookers, X-rated movies, smug or incredulous tourists, and Muslim streethawkers selling incense and religious tracts. A slightly unreal space, to be sure. A bad, if vivid, dream. By the mid-1980s the city fathers had decided that the situation could not go on, not with the hotel business suffering as it was. So the Times Square redevelopment plan was unveiled, promising to replace the undesirables with office buildings of the sort that have made Sixth Avenue so attractive, and store space for The Gap and Banana Republic. Where the hookers and X-rated video outlets were to go, we are just finding out now as they fan throughout the city to different neighborhoods. Be that as it may, the city has in the interim handed sections of the street over to New York's artists. Not all of the old crowd of drug and sex merchants

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is gone and the new proprietors are just beginning to arrive—and the result is quite worth seeing.

Conceptual Art, which has always made me uncomfortable when viewed in the artificial setting of a gallery or museum (and, as such, rarely works for me) is founded on the idea of avoiding what we might call appetite, or sensual pleasure, and basing its effects on the visual-as-intellectual. Too much art, these artists believe, is a matter of essentially mindless, repetitive optical gratification—what Duchamp scornfully called "retinal pleasure." These are not the people who would be happy with more sunflowers for the Met, obviously. Their art aims to provoke thought, reorder values, shake up known or perceived realities. So imagine, without warning, walking along 42nd Street past the usual phalanx of marquees and looking up to see, not a porno title in capital letters, but a Jennie Holzer Truism. "WHAT URGE WILL SAVE US NOW THAT SEX WON'T?" proclaims one. "RAISE BOYS AND GIRLS THE SAME WAY" spells out another, a marquee that only a month before was advertising its usual "slasher" double bill. ("DEVIANTS ARE SACRIFICED TO INCREASE GROUP SOLIDARITY" had a small crowd of teenagers beneath it one day, all making different remarks about that particularly cryptic—and to them annoying—slogan.) Other store fronts or boarded-up theaters featured illustrated posters with passages from James Baldwin, Alice Walker, Lorraine Hansberry. Matt Mullican's "logo" drawings filled one wall, Jane Dickson's painted heads another. Small placards with quotations from defenders and opponents of the renovation—including Robert Mapplethorpe's remarks on what the area meant to him when he discovered it in the early 1970s—can be found here and there, if you let your eyes wander and take in at leisure a truly, oddly, unnervingly transformed environment within the living city. Best of all is the now-closed cinema where, if you press up against the glass doors, you see dozens of pairs of old shoes hammered into the foyer floor and white dresses on hangers arranged in single file on into the dark interior of the building, like so many ghosts of past patrons on parade. It will all be gone soon enough, as the city does whatever it is going to do with this famous block, but for one brief moment the imagination of contemporary artists reminded a few people that we have somehow allowed the surreal to become our reality and that contemplation of the world and what we have made of it should not be reserved for the precincts of the museum alone.

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SYDNEY LEA

To Use and Transform: Recent Poetry of Charles Tomlinson

In the three books published by Charles Tomlinson since his 1987 *Collected Poems*,[1] the demonstrably *wrought*, both as subject and method, have come to prevail over what Jonathan Holden calls "affected naturalness." Today's Tomlinson is simply more nourished by mainstream British verse traditions than was the young admirer of Dr. Williams; and if he still shows a master's hand at rendering the natural—what he elsewhere calls the "unfencable"—landscape, the poet as frequently craves some constructed enclosure now. At the very opening of *The Return*, for instance, he finds himself "In the Borghese Gardens," which leads him to think of the *Ur*-garden, expelled from which "we are the heirs of healing artifice." In another poem, stepping over "the sun-browned / drop-outs / who litter the ascent" of the Spanish Steps, Tomlinson proposes that

> only art
> can return us to an Eden where
> each plane and part
> is bonded, fluid, fitting and
> fits like this stair.
>
> "Revolution"

The drop-outs' muddled politics invite condescension here less than the fact that "their flights are inward / unlike these" marble ones.

But if for Tomlinson artifice can now appear preferable to vision, we must not compare him, say, to the Wordsworth who rejected the "unchartered freedom" of his youth, writing sonnets in defense of capital punishment or whatever. Having already noted, for example, that Tomlinson's newer poems seem more strictly measured than those of thirty years ago, I must likewise note that they're still quick with technical invention—as in the lovely "Fountain":

> Art grows from hurt, you say. And I must own
> Adam in Eden would have need of none.
> Yet why should it not flow as a Roman fountain,
> A fortunate fall between the sun and stone?

[1] *The Return* (1987), $8.95; *Annunciations* (1989), $10.95; *The Door in the Wall* (1992), $11.95, all in paper from Oxford University Press.

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All a fountain can simulate and spread—
Scattering a music of public places
Through murmurs, mirrors, secrecy and shade—
Makes reparation for what hurt gave rise
To a wish to speak beyond the wound's one mouth,
And draw to singleness the several voices
That double a strength, diversify a truth,
Letting a shawl of water drape, escape
The basin's brim reshaping itself to fill
A whole clear cistern with its circling calm,
And the intricacies of moss and marble
With echoes of distance, aqueduct and hill.

A sonnet, each line aptly rhyming with another. So we assume . . . and we're almost right. Tomlinson's poem is—in the best sense—artificial, and yet it tugs at the corners of its very artifice, swelling the inherited form by a couple of lines, playing free with slant rhymes, even non-rhymes. The author, then, provides us not only an interfusion of public and private motifs, but also the interfused pleasure of measured verse *and* technical surprise.

This way with style and form is but one sign in his recent canon of the poet's concern to impose design on our always unruly world—even as he refuses to settle for mere formula or program.

In "The Unpainted Mountain,"

All of the mountain seemed disparity
That I could neither think to one, nor see
Save as a tomb of stones, a livid chine
That blocked back distance.

Tomlinson's *cri de coeur*—"Where was the mountain that the painter painted?"—is precisely a call for design, for art's capacity to organize brute reality. Not until he and his companion, rounding a bend, perceive "An image that we knew from foot to crown" are fear and gloom relieved, the word "image" having a particular resonance for this particular speaker.

Likewise, in a reprise of the same theme, Tomlinson describes how a peak, "its seamed rock / Worn by no human wrinkles, stood / At a frontier":

Rounding the mountain, we
Stood with it: the descent, the repetition
As that farness fronted us yet again
Might have been a dream or a damnation,
But the lowlands opened to receive us,
Brought us the first sun free of mountain shadow
And the demarcation of ploughland, vineyard, meadow.

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The author treasures demarcation and—in every sense—cultivation; and yet I've said we must avoid applying simple dialectics to an artist so subtle. However ominous its presence, some ineffable otherness charges Tomlinson's imagination too:

> From above the snow-line, and above the snow,
> Something was tracking us, measuring our return
> Past the stone certitude of barn on barn.

So "The Peak" ends, its affection for human construct countered by an acknowledgment of possible sublimity.

In many of Tomlinson's newer poems, the least hint of self-indulgent "inward flight" is checked by the attraction of made things, but as we have just seen, the reverse is equally true. In "Netherlands"—another semi-sonnet—"The train is taking us through a Mondrian." To be sure, "curvature is no feature of this view," and yet

> . . . why did the sky never cause him to digress
> With its mile-high cloud mountains
> Pillowed and piled over hill-lessness?

Tomlinson can even tweak *himself* for feeling the seductions of mere order. In one charming lyric, he and a companion

> . . . let down the plumbline we have improvised
> Out of twine and a stone, and as it arrives,
> Sounding and sounding past round on round of wall,
> Our images liquidly multiply, flow out
> And past all bounds to drown in the dazzle
> As a laugh of light runs echoing up from below.
>
> "The Well"

Once again the word "image" has a peculiar value, but in this case the poet applauds how it can break, rather than establishing, "bounds." With his Thoreauvian instruments of measure, he is the object of a deeper world's metaphorical laughter. Just so, Tomlinson chides an infamous merchant for seeing everything in quantifiable terms: taken alone, "From Porlock" could seem like so much adolescent romanticism; in the context of *The Return* at large, it bears more than a germ of authorial self-mockery.

It feels unconscionable to close discussion of *The Return* without dwelling on its tours de force: above all, the title elegy to his friend Paolo Bertolani's wife, an achingly beautiful sequence, the more so for its classical dignity and reserve; also the curiously haunting prose piece, "At Chimayo," which takes up the very interrelations of enclosure and the "unfencable" world. However, since each would

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demand a virtual essay unto itself, I'll say only that, if you read nothing else by a poet's hand this month, you must read these.

The whole of *Annunciations*, and not just its title poem, is preoccupied with light, both physical and metaphorical. On the physical side are myriad moon- and sunbeams, mirrors and other reflectors, landscapes both bright and dark. Figuratively, luminescence is much affiliated to the very notion of poetry, or at least of art—a notion that for Tomlinson seems to extend some premises of the best poems in *The Return*. In "Variation," for example, the poet watches the moon climb a forested hillside:

> you can measure out the pace
> Of the unpausing visitant between tree and tree,
> Setting each trunk alight, then hurrying on
> To shine back down over the entire wood. . . .

At length it breaks free of the brow. However,

> It does not arrive alone
> But carries the memory of that spread of space
> And of the aeons across which it has shone till now
> From the beginning. This is the illumination it pours
> Into the shadows and the watcher's mind,
> As it touches on planes of roofs it could not foresee
> Shaping and sharing its light when it set out
> In a rain of disintegrating comets, of space creating.

Such illumination, like the best literature, seems somehow to merge nature and culture, the sublime and the quotidian; it marks the moment when, to quote an apt phrasing from Tomlinson's title poem, we experience a "domestic miracle."

One arresting piece from *Annunciations* is worth quoting in full, for it captures the interplay between capital-R Reality and capital-A Art with an intelligence worthy of a Wallace Stevens, while remaining as mindful as Stevens of the ambiguities that the best intelligence must fail to dissipate:

> Above the Rio Grande
>
> The light, in its daylong play, refuses
> The mountains' certainty that they
> Will never change—range on range of them
> In an illumination that looks like snow.
> On this afternoon when the clouds are one impending grey
> Above the Rio Grande, the light will not obey
> Either the clouds' or the rocks' command

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To keep its distance from them. It shifts and shows
Even the cloudshadows how to transform
The very stones by opening over them
Dark wings that cradle and crease their solidity—
As if to say: I gather up the rocks
Out of their world of things that are merely things,
I call dark wings to be bearers of light
As they sail off the shapes they pall
And, in their wake, leave this brightening snowfall
That melts and is renewed. Yet if the light
Washes the rocks away, the rocks remain
To tell what it is, and only so
Can they both flow and stay, and the mind
That floating thing, steady to know itself
In all the exceedings of its certainty,
As here, beneath the expanses deepening
Through the cloud-rock ranges of evening sky.

As so often in Tomlinson, one admires the formal elegance (and the slight subversiveness that here moves so many rhymes from endings to middles of lines); the evocation of scene that in this poem we must inevitably call brilliant; and above all the authority lent by both to Tomlinson's argument: that the inhuman world *is* inhuman, but without our imaginative intervention, it cannot even be called that; on the other hand, our mere human constructs, including "artistic" ones, are as nothing if they remain steadfastly within the bounds of mental "certainty."

The further we read in *Annunciations*, the more we see it, exactly, as modern-day poetry of Enlightenment, by which I mean poetry founded on a broad humanism. To that extent, it must perhaps conflict with such trendy contemporary theory as regards the very notion of "breadth" as delusion, insisting rather on the determinacy of gender, ethnicity, and above all lately, class. In "The Garden" Tomlinson aptly notes that

now they say
Gardens are merely the expression of a class
Masterful enough to enamel away
All signs of the labour that produced them.

He regards this as a "crass reading," however, which

forgets that imagination
Outgoes itself; outgrows aim
And origin; forgets that art
Does not offer the sweat of parturition
As proof of its sincerity.

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Amen. And yet the poet is conscious such a position will appear quaint and timorous to the court jesters of the Theoretical Princedom. So he confronts them with one of the more withering and witty *mots* in recent poetry:

> One must smile
> At the irritability of critics, who
> Impotent to produce, secrete over what they see
> Their dislike or semi-assent, then blame
> The thing they have tamed for being tame.

At a time when many a poet him- or herself wholly accepts the half-truths of literary academics: that "talent" is a chimera, that "texts" reveal only the power relations which produced them, that "poetry" (indeed "art" in general) is an archaic misnomer, etc.—at such a time I find it refreshing to hear an author condescend in this fashion to the critically with-it.

Indeed, I like to hear him engage in almost *any* argumentation, whether oblique or forthright. I like to hear him in "The Headland," for example, declare that the sea

> rehearses an after-life
> (The only one certainly there) like that of verse
> That holds out its shell to the ear of a living man,
> Reminding him that he will be outlasted
> By the scansion in its waves, beating a shore
> That is the beginning of the voyage out
> Toward the continuing sunsets, on and on
> Cast back across the facades of the shoreline town.

If poetry is ever (again) to offer anything to The Common Man and Woman, whose champions the Theorists set themselves up to be, it will surely do so by virtue of such faith, not by resigning itself to mere "textuality."

Tomlinson, in short, still feels confident in the existence of universals. (That confidence is neither naive nor immodest, though: see "Parking Lot," for example, or even the portion of "The Headland" unquoted above.) To that extent, he feels free to translate events, even "natural" ones, into instructive terms. The more successful of his poems in the later volumes will therefore, typically, begin with a rendering of some scene—as in "Chance":

> I saw it as driving snow, the spume,
> Then, as the waves hit rock
> Foam-motes took off like tiny birds
> Drawn downwind. . . .

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But the poet will "follow through," moving toward a generalizing rhetoric:

> What do they tell
> These occurrences, these resemblances that speak to you
> With no human voice? What they told then
> Was that the energies pouring through space and time,
> Spun into snow-lace, suspended into flight,
> Had waited on our chance appearance here,
> To take their measure, to re-murmur in human sounds
> The nearing roar of this story of far beginnings
> As it shapes out and resounds itself along the shore.

The less successful poems in *Annunciations* are the occasional ones that seem *not* to follow through but to stick at the first phase of the process just described. By so doing they remain mere vignettes:

> Felix Randal
>
> *Or the Black Economy*
>
> The farrier comes with his forge. He shoes
> For cash only. The ash of a portable fire
> Leaves no trace in the account books of the nation,
> The acridity of singeing hooves prompts no enquiry
> And the sounds of the hammer are swallowed by the air
> As scavenging farm dogs gobble the parings.
> The collapsible forge ballasts his swaying van:
> Unpursued by conscience or by priest—Felix is gone.

It is unseemly of me to cry out "So what?" and unseemlier still to counsel my superior. I do both nonetheless, urging Tomlinson to sustain the rhetorical vigor I have praised.

Such urging arises in part from the fact that the vignette sort of poem, the sort lacking in what I've called follow-through, is far more common in *The Door in the Wall* than in the other books under discussion here. I speak out because I hope not to have discovered a trend in the mature Tomlinson.

At all events, and in spite of my own earlier warning against applying simple dialectics to Tomlinson's achievement, I believe I've found something to separate those poems in his latest collection that stick in the mind from those that do not. Let us look at two (of many) tree pieces. First, "The Clearance":

> They have fired the brush in the half-felled wood:
> Extinguishing piles still smoke on, blue;

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Beacons of briars and ivy blazing through,
  Crest the detritus. A glitter
And, suddenly red, a starburst breaks
  As the wind takes hold, and the burnings
And the glows go spreading uphill
  Into the wood-heart. The cut logs
Tell, in their greenness, of how wet
  The wood was, and now lets in
The hilltop horizon and the sky.
  Fresh plantings will branch out there,
Feel the embrace of entering air—
  Spaced to receive our climbing glance
That can survey all of the falling stream
  Woodland had hidden away, a white
Rope the water lets down
  Sounding closer and closer against the ear,
A keen, clear flight to the feet of whoever is standing here.

How not be impressed, as usual, by the formal deftness and the evocation of place? But how are we to feel or think about what has *happened* to the place? How does Tomlinson himself feel or think?

Compare "The Stair":

The limbs of the giant spruce that leans
  So close to the house, have formed
A kind of stair, a walk-way
  Up to the summit. The squirrel that lives here
Scorns to descend it step by step,
  But with an insane bravado runs
To a branch end, then drops
  Accurately off and, six flights down,
Arrives upright, pine-cone in hand,
  To remain there, tear and eat it:
Perfectly secure, he is perfectly sane.
  Today, comes snow. We should accept
The long-standing invitation
  To climb those now carpeted treads,
But snow and commonsense say no—
  Such analogues are not to be acted on.
And yet we inhabit our images: squirrel
  Can even seem a god of heights,
The tree his spruce fane. The animal
  Is asleep, and if he were not, he would be
Unconscious of the place devised which we
  Take into our minds and so ascend
The real by way of the imaginary tree:

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Both lean to the house together,
And, even without their deity, can teach
These wooden walls that this house is a tree house:
We live in a place always just out of reach.

Part of the movement here is from factuality to metaphor, and even further—into meditation on metaphor's potentialities and limitations. Such gestures are parallel to what I lately discerned as that typical progression in Tomlinson's better poems (of which "The Stair" is one) from observation to rhetoric, from specific to general. It is when the second components in this list of binaries are eliminated or radically repressed that a Tomlinson composition fails to rise *above* mere composition.

Not that we should automatically equate a motion toward a closure in overt statement or argument with success in this poet's work. Indeed, I find the most gripping piece from *The Door in the Wall* to be "Ode to San Francisco," which, for all its discursiveness in parts, shows likewise that a heart-wrenching eloquence can still result from memorable final imagery:

'I write to you,'
he explains,
'in blood,
four of my friends
having died of late.'
He does not state
the cause.
It is strange
to live in a city where
one third of the males
may die of the same malady:
an ecclesiastic
of the cathedral is dying:
what he calls
'a caring relationship'
has brought him to it.
The writer of travelogues
is dying:
he continues to speak
of a tropical infection.
The shape on the sidewalk
that cannot sit erect
against the sunlit wall
but falls forward
is dying—
the placard beside the begging cup

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is there to identify
the nature of his sickness.
The city
has an air of medieval fatality.
I once thought it gay
(that damaged word),
then suddenly
the bright towers
took on
a look of such duplicity
I saw that the ocean
was too weak
ever to cleanse it,
although the home
of Venus herself—
though not of her son Eros.
Hesiod
calls him the son of Chaos
but that was before
succeeding generations
spoke of him
as that 'mischievous child'
Cupid
thinking him half a joke.

I have said my critical say, without beginning to indicate how frequent and numerous are the poems in *The Door in the Wall* that I celebrate rather than carping at: see, to name only a few, "Fire" or "Song" or "Response to Hopkins" or "December."

Also see "Hacienda," whose opening lines synopsize the position I have taken on all of Tomlinson's memorable work here:

What I like is when
men take a thing—
this river, say—
and, in the succinctest way,
use and transform it. . . .

That's what I like as well, especially in Charles Tomlinson, whose big heart and mind are ill served by his *failures* to attempt the transformative, but gloriously served whenever that attempt is made—as we too are served, better than by the vast majority of this poet's contemporaries, young or old.

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R. S. GWYNN

What the Center Holds

I WAS RECENTLY AMUSED TO READ some remarks by Anthony Thwaite in *Book World* about how he and his countrymen perceive the current situation of American poetry:

> From here in England, where I write this, the American battle between the "neo-formalists" and the "language" poets, the cooked and the raw, and all the other critical collisions that A. Alvarez 30 years ago—in a British context—impatiently characterised as the 'gang-warfare which, at a distance, can be dignified as disagreements between schools of verse,' appears to be going on undiminished, as rancourous and separatist as ever.

Everyone seems to like these neat divisions, for they give critics a nice bone to chew on (Daniel Hoffman and Vernon Shetley have both recently published essays on the two factions) and they help academics reduce the diversity of contemporary American poetry to a simple partisan conflict that spawns all manner of thesis sentences. But the simple fact, disappointing as it may be to Thwaite and his countrymen, is that American poetry is not rent by a turf struggle between morpheme-smeared Bloods and iambic-crunching Crips; the high ground of American poetry is held by poets whose work exhibits a marked uniformity of style and subject, and the Language poets and the New Formalists are simply carrying on localized border skirmishes against the forces of the New Academy.

If our cousins would like to obtain a clearer sense of what the center holds, what better place to look than *The Pittsburgh Book of Contemporary American Poetry*,[1] edited by Ed Ochester and Peter Oresick? That one of the most thriving centers of American poetry should be a university press in a city that once epitomized American industrial griminess is appropriately ironic; one need only recall what lengths the young aesthete in Willa Cather's "Paul's Case" took to escape from there, what he did to keep from going back. The Pitt Poetry Series has been in existence for twenty-five years, and the forty-five poets whose work is represented here make up less than half the total number whose books have been published by the press. Some statistical

[1] THE PITTSBURGH BOOK OF CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN POETRY, ed. by *Ed Ochester and Peter Oresick*. University of Pittsburgh Press. $29.95; $15.95.

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accounting may be revealing. Slightly over half are women; there are three blacks and three Hispanics. Roughly three quarters list advanced degrees in creative writing, and about the same number teach in university writing programs. Many of them have published more than one book with Pitt, and the interval between books is about five years. But, more importantly, not one of them is in any danger of being classified as either a Language poet or a New Formalist.

To be sure, there are a few prose poems and free meters that range from anorectic to steroidal, but, with the exception of Ronald Wallace's and David Wojahn's loose sonnets and villanelles, nothing that could be called a traditional form. The language is more often put through the paces of straightforward prose syntax, with a few local tropes (similes especially, with an occasional allusion if it doesn't require a footnote), and rarely ventures very far from first-person vignettes of what, for lack of a better term, might be called the American scene. Opening the book, I light on these lines by Greg Pape:

> On my living room wall hangs a Navajo rug
> handwoven by Virginia Yazzie. A Storm Pattern
> with a black and white border, through which
> a spirit line passes, a design like silhouettes
>
> of mesas on the Colorado Plateau.

Or these by Jane Flanders:

> Twelve children, twelve gray geese in starched
> collars, file onstage. Like their bells,
> which are set out buffet-style on a long table,
> they are graduated.

Or Toi Derricote:

> Every town with black Catholics has a St. Peter
> Claver's.
> My first was nursery school.
> Miss Maturin made us fold our towels in a regulation
> square and nap on army cots.
> No mother questioned; no child sassed.

To carp overmuch that the resources of the narrative or dramatic genres, of rhetorical invention, of sound mated to sense are barely tapped here would be to ask perhaps too much from an anthology snipped from the tag end of the century. The pleasures to be taken from the Pitt series (and there are many) are primarily those of the main-traveled road.

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Neal Bowers' *Night Vision*,[2] a third collection, is a book in many ways representative of the center but nevertheless sparkles with variety and invention, filled with poems that keep a fellow poet wistfully sighing, "Gee, I wish I'd thought of that first." It's indeed difficult to resist an opening like "Notes from the Morticians' Convention," a piece of mordant satire that will resonate with anyone who has spent a day or two at a professional meeting, even (or especially) the MLA. The conference's sessions, with titles like "Consoling the Bereaved: A New Methodology," consider such weighty matters as the ethics of advertising: "Of course there's always the Yellow Pages, / cheap and accessible to everyone, / a simple entry between Frozen Foods and Furnaces." In the midst of this black comedy fall a few disquieting moments where the conventioneers are forced to uneasy self-scrutiny: "When you hear yourself say, / in a moment of passion, 'I love you more than life,' / think twice. Think twice."

The first half of *Night Vision* is so filled with references to death, disease, and burials that I was at first tempted to nominate Bowers for belated election to the Graveyard School (Is that the spirit of Edward Young lurking in the title?). However, the overall effect of the poems is anything but melancholy, mainly because, I suspect, one keeps hearing faint echoes of poems from the canon that Bowers has dressed up, perhaps unconsciously, in new finery. Housman, for example. "For the Heart" finds the poet out running, half out of his head with heat and exhaustion, when he sees a vision of "Dale Shoemaker, killed in Vietnam / just out of high school twenty years ago" grinning at him from a passing car. In this revised version, the "boy without responsibility" dies young while the ex-jock is stuck on the road all runners come, growing "middle-aged and legging it down the backroads / of America, as if this one, too, were winnable." Or consider the hints of Stevens in "Bring Pies," a catalog of how the "consolations of cinnamon and cocoa" invariably accompany illness and grief: "Come bearing baskets of custards sliced thick / and certain of themselves, solid / in the platter and heavy as fact." In "Dead Weight," a poem reminiscent of Seamus Heaney's "Digging," Bowers recalls how his gardener father "died lifting, pulling the weary beans / and tomatoes out of November by their roots / and pitching them armful by armful / into the woods at the end of the yard." Like many sons, Bowers finds that it is his lot to carry on the work, albeit in different fashion:

> I finished the job he started,
> uprooted the rest of the plants
> and dropped them on his pile
> at the edge of the brown tree line;

[2] NIGHT VISION, by *Neal Bowers*. BkMk Press. $9.25.

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but that was not enough.
His weight became granite,
grew immense as quarries,
and the great globe wobbled,
its axis screaming for balance.
I brought what I could carry:
these words piled here.

Throughout, Bowers' subtle use of tradition adds a secondary level of pleasure to the reading.

It would be unfair to leave Bowers without mention of "Hedging," one of the wittiest lyric celebrations of marriage since John Frederick Nims's wonderful "Love Poem." Here the conceit turns on the respectful division of labor between partners, how her knowledge of "secret / additives—a dash of thyme / in scrambled eggs" complements his of "how to start / the lawnmower and set the carburetor screw." The final stanza offers a double-reversal of traditional roles and a neat resolution:

If a fuse should blow, she can change it,
and he can starch and iron his shirts,
assuming there would be anything to see
if he weren't there, or anywhere to go
if she were gone.

This is one of those final stanzas one reads, pauses a moment, and then says, "Right!"

Yusef Komunyakaa is a poet whose work I have known mostly through anthology pieces, one of which, the beautiful "Facing It," is the most poignant elegy that has been written about the Vietnam War. The "it," of course, is the Wall:

A white vet's image floats
closer to me, then his pale eyes
look through mine. I'm a window.
He's lost his right arm
inside the stone. In the black mirror
a woman's trying to erase names:
No, she's brushing a boy's hair.

It is a pleasure to have *Neon Vernacular: New and Selected Poems*[3] in hand, a collection that gathers together poems from small press publications with those of three of Komunyakaa's books from Wesleyan (work from his most recent collection, *Magic City*, is not

[3] NEON VERNACULAR: New and Selected Poems, by *Yusef Komunyakaa*. Wesleyan University Press. $14.95p.

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included). In all, it's a mixed bag, with the best work the newest. Komunyakaa has written about jazz and edited an anthology of poems on the subject, but too often his own jazz poems, like this passage from "Elegy for Thelonious," consist of recitations of allusions that have little intrinsic interest:

> *Crepuscule with Nelly*
> plays inside the bowed head.
> "Dig the Man Ray of piano!"
> O Satisfaction
> hot fingers blur
> on those white rib keys.
> *Coming on the Hudson.*
> *Monk's Dream.*

When Komunyakaa is able to step back from the discographies and incorporate jazz-style riffs into his speech patterns, the effect is much more gratifying, as in "Unnatural State of the Unicorn," where he asks a lover to set aside his academic, poetic, and assorted other credentials and simply "Introduce me first as a man." Here, his superb ear is much in evidence:

> Before embossed limited editions,
> before fat artichoke hearts marinated
> in rich sauce & served with imported wines,
> before antics & Agnus Dei,
> before the stars in your eyes
> mean birth sign or Impression,
> I am a man.

Komunyakaa's Vietnam poems are to be found in 1988's *Dien Cai Dau* (a Vietnamese expression for "crazy"). He served as a correspondent during the conflict, and some of his descriptions of battle have an Ernie Pyle-like quality of compassion tinged with a journalist's unsparing eye for ironic detail:

> He danced with tall grass
> for a moment, like he was swaying
> with a woman. Our gun barrels
> glowed white-hot.
> When I got to him,
> a blue halo
> of flies had already claimed him.

The most recent work in *Neon Vernacular* focuses on the poet's hometown of Bogalusa, Louisiana, a subject that he heretofore has not explored. Though Wesleyan's jacket copy is quick to note that

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Bogalusa was "once a center of Klan activity and later a focus of Civil Rights efforts," Komunyakaa's themes are rites of passage, friendship, and family. True, "The whole town smells / Like the world's oldest anger," but its source is the chemical plants and paper mills, "the cloudy / Commerce of wheels, of chemicals / That turn workers into pulp." I particularly like "Immigrants," a section of a long poem made up of scenes of growing up, for its unusual racial perspective, how blacks viewed "Guissipie, Misako, / & Goldberg" and other exotic imports to the South:

> We showed them fishing holes
> & guitar licks. Wax pompadours
> Bristled like rooster combs,
> But we couldn't stop loving them
> Even after they sold us
> Rotting fruit & meat,
> With fingers pressed down
> On the scales.

Probably the most impressive new poem is the last, a long elegy for the poet's father, a laborer who worked hard at everything, even making his children's Easter egg hunts a challenge, "hiding the eggs / In gopher holes & underneath roots." Some of Komunyakaa's memories are not easy, recalling his combative father's "Wanting me to believe / I shouldn't have been born / With hands & feet / If I didn't do / Your kind of work." Others capture delicate spots of time:

> Sometimes you could be
> That man on a red bicycle,
> With me on the handlebars,
> Just rolling along a country road
> On the edge of July, honeysuckle
> Lit with mosquito hawks.

At the end of a man's life, with his "name & features half / X-ed out," the old resentments have to be set aside. What is left is a son's lingering respect for the strength that "steered us through the flowering / Dogwood like a thread of blood."

Because, like James Applewhite, I grew up in North Carolina I have long been aware of his poetry, not in the sense of having individual poems by heart but in the more general way by which we can sometimes be familiar with a poet's work without being intimate with it. When I think of his poems, images of the small tobacco farms that dot the state come to mind—rows of milky green plants rising in stark contrast from the red earth, the rude log and mud-chinked outbuildings that must give pause to visitors from more orderly climes, the whole ornate planting and harvesting ritual, from late winter "bed-

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ding" of the young plants under squares of white linen to the incomprehensible cadences of the auctioneers' chants in the warehouses of the dog days. Applewhite knows this region intimately, and it is perhaps fitting that he teaches at Duke University, that Gothic monument to tobacco philanthropy and millions of blasted lungs.

In the second poem in *A History of the River*,[4] "Making Tobacco Money," Applewhite describes the places sacred to the druids of *Nicotiana*:

> So the barns
> loomed up at twilight, squarer and higher for their
> foundation spaces than the two-story houses;
> assertions of order against chaos, the furnacelike
> masonry showing its fiery half-oval, under heavy,
> green-reeking leaf—looped shapes hanging from the
> tobacco sticks, primordial, slime-colored, odious
> as catfish, to be converted into civilized tender,
> become material for a gesture, the pinching from
> a snuffbox or rolling of cigarette.

This passage reveals some of the strengths and weaknesses of Applewhite's work. He is able to invest his subject with an epic grandeur, abetted perhaps by the sweep of the long lines (the enjambments on "their" and "the" seem arbitrary, though), but the imagery is less than precise. Since the tobacco is in fact cured ("flue-cured") by heat from wood fires, why is the masonry described as "furnace*like*"? The phrase "odious as catfish" also seems to pull the wrong way since the sweet fragrance of the curing tobacco is what Applewhite is trying to evoke. Still more of a problem, though, is Applewhite's predilection, in many of his poems, for the use of sweeping panorama to describe the passing of time. Here is another passage, this one describing the effects of modern institutions of public health on rural life:

> Gradually
> medicine grew helpful, with ether for setting broken bones,
> vaccinations for smallpox, diphtheria, typhoid fever.
> Survivable operations began to be performed in hospitals
> in small cities: Wilson, Goldsboro, New Bern, places
> of last resort, where the grief-stricken couple might take
> their screaming child in their new automobile late
> at night: museumlike corridors smelling of disinfectant.

Eventually, reading these poems becomes rather like watching a film composed solely of montage sequences, all spinning newspapers and

[4] A HISTORY OF THE RIVER, by *James Applewhite*. Louisiana State University Press. $15.95; $8.95.

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flipping calendars and trains puffing through moonlit landscapes. Everything rushes by in a blur without the slightest bump of a dramatic curve. Instead of narrative, what we get here is narration, the disembodied soundtrack of a New Deal-era documentary film.

Nevertheless, Applewhite can occasionally paint a vivid scene, and when he focuses long enough on a single incident or character he can be very effective. In "A Wilson County Farmer" he describes the middle-aged title character, standing in his mercury-lit yard at night "in shadow of this / unnatural light before his packhouse, still smoking a Lucky," gazing in through "those / sashes and panes from just after the Civil War" at his family watching television. For the farmer, the incongruity adds up to the thought that "maybe he has survived / too long." Driving through the tobacco belt these days, I find it hard not to think of how strange it is that all that Scotch-Irish thrift, industry, and decent labor, stretching almost four centuries now, have gone into the cultivation of a poisonous weed that the government would be totally justified in outlawing. Applewhite's Harry Ploughman sees the end game of his way of life like this:

> With the quotas, the declining
> prices, every day more news about cancer, this man
> who learned tobacco from his father, who himself couldn't
> read and write, looks far across at red Antares
> over the swamp woods there beyond the highway, not knowing
> what star he is seeing, and feels his station in this
> place lit by blue light and T.V. as odd and as lonely.

One of the poems in James Whitehead's *Near at Hand*[5] was composed for Jimmy Carter's homecoming celebration in Plains after the 1981 inauguration, praising the former president for

> How carefully you were responsible
> And seemed of course to be astonished by
> A world outrageous in its vanity,
> World unsurprised by greed so terrible
> It would desire complete catastrophe.

As the occasion indicates, Whitehead has gathered over a decade's work here—earlier collections appeared in 1966 and 1979—and many of both its private and public events have not set well with him. The book contains several elegies (the finest is for novelist John Clellon Holmes) and meditations on divisive issues that range from thoughtful ("a baby is at sea / Inside or out the womb for a long

[5] NEAR AT HAND, by *James Whitehead*. University of Missouri Press. $16.95; $9.95.

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time / And should be killed with plenty of respect, / If killed at all. Some ritual is called for / While we are practicing infanticide") to downright cranky, as witness this octave on ". . . the Pope's Recent Sermons to the Poor of Latin America":

> The Pope's a busy guy, be sure of that,
> Whether he's grey and pretty without his hat,
> Or obviously out of date with the damned thing on,—
> Too busy to have a vision based on reason,—
> The Reasonable Vision of the Holy Condom,
> The Holy Foam, the Holy Pill or Shot,
> Whatever he might say is God's sweet will.
> The Pope's a bad poet and his prose is cruel.

Whitehead's opinions are not likely to find easy acceptance among most readers, but, after finishing this book, no one, I think, will conclude that they were arrived at in haste.

Whitehead is not primarily a poet of the Horatian mode; his characteristic subjects—the South, family, friendship, the body's slow descent to its final level—have remained constant through the years, though the violence that often marked his early work has moderated. He remains a poet who celebrates the social rituals by which our individual human defects are blurred into soft focus by tobacco smoke, bourbon, and late-night talk:

> I'm out of town and visiting old friends,
> Old girls and boys of the successful worlds,
> And the talk is serious, pretty good
> Especially about the things amends
> Should be made for: not answering the mail,
> Lying through your teeth when the God damned lie
> Is obvious, going for the new wife
> Of your running buddy, or the husband. Whatever.

Even Whitehead's quirky titles, the longest of any poet's I can recall, bestow a sense of ceremony on moments which he will not allow custom to stale: "At the Roadhouse He Turns to His Wife with an Observation on Mortality, Then Asks Her for a Dance."

Whitehead often employs personae to go over the same subjects he has elsewhere broached in his own voice. Parental responsibility is one of these: "I'm the one who always grieves / When they go. I want them here, at work, at play, / At whatever age impossibility affords." In "We're Listening to the Features Editor" the title character goes to view the corpse of an anencephalic baby, "A six-month rough draft nature rejected," of whom he is probably the father:

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She took it from a pinkish baby blanket
With little figures there,
Though I can't remember what the animal,
And placed it nicely on the shining table.

Well, here we are, I thought, and there it is,
With a frightened gargoyle's face (no skull behind)
As terrible as all we fear of error.

At times I get the impression that Whitehead has to confront his own demons obliquely, coming at them through the eyes of characters with whom he shares great, but not total, sympathy; that the built-in ironies of the dramatic mode can add moral complexity to poetry seems to be something that most of our contemporaries have forgotten. With so many books of this post-confessional era sounding like auditions for daytime talk shows it has become almost archaic for a critic to praise aesthetic distance, but it is a quality I paradoxically find in this most personal of poets. Perhaps tact is an inherited trait. In "For My Father at Eighty," the poet observes that his father "never talked about the war / Except to name some places he had been, / Le Havre, Remagen, moving on Berlin." One day, in the midst of "A good time in the best of company, / He joined our easy talk of history":

He'd seen

The armies' soldiers, frozen, torn apart,
And, worse, a death camp, thousands naked and starved,
In five great pits, enough to break your heart.
We did our best. Only three survived.

His story was five hundred words, no more.
He told it well. He'd told his war.
My father's a gentle Presbyterian.
At eighty, thoughtful, he believes in hell.

So, I think, does this poet, even if it exists only in a lower-case version.

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DIANE MIDDLEBROOK

Where All the Ladders Start

In Seattle, where I went to college in the late 1950s, bartenders at an establishment called Trader Vic's used to make an expensive ladies' drink called a zombie: a bowl of high-octane rum disguised as fruit juice, on which a gardenia floated. Guys joked about buying a girl a zombie on her twenty-first birthday—her first legal drink—with the hope of scoring afterward what Philip Larkin would have called a "pock." In the fifties, before the pill, nice girls didn't have sex unless they were out of their minds or married.

I was reminded of those days by an anecdote in Andrew Motion's biography of Philip Larkin. Kingsley Amis and Larkin had been students together at Oxford; Amis recalls Larkin saying, " 'I *don't* want to take a girl out and spend *circa* £5 when I can toss myself off in five minutes, free, and have the rest of the evening to myself.' " Just such coarse, comic stories have given the biography immense notoriety since publication in the UK last spring,[1] following on the heels of the massive volume of letters edited by Anthony Thwaite.[2] Together these books delivered a one-two punch to British self-regard, for what they revealed about the range of embarrassing practices and reactionary attitudes in a man whose poetry had gained him lofty tributes.

Philip Larkin died relatively young, at age sixty-three, but by the time of his death in 1985 he had won many honors (seven honorary doctorates, for example), and had also declined some prestigious ones: the position of Poet Laureate (too public) and the OBE (not good enough). Margaret Thatcher claimed to be an admirer of his poems; under her government Larkin was named CBE, and also Companion of Honour. Larkin, who admired Mrs. Thatcher, accepted these awards.

Poets rarely capture such prizes; why Larkin? In *Who's Who* he listed his occupation as *librarian*, explaining "a man is what he is paid for"; from 1955 he was paid by the University of Hull. He couldn't have lived off his published writing: two novels, five slim volumes of poetry, a controversial edition of *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse*, a collection of literary essays, and a compendium of jazz

[1] PHILIP LARKIN: A Writer's Life, by *Andrew Motion*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $35.00.

[2] SELECTED LETTERS OF PHILIP LARKIN, ed. by *Anthony Thwaite*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $40.00.

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reviews. But the speaker in his poems represented, for many readers, a distinctively English character ideal: "The Less Deceived," as he titled himself in a book of verse. Larkin's best-known works ("Church Going," "An Arundel Tomb," "The Whitsun Weddings" "High Windows") expressed a fortifying mixture of disdain for newfangledness and attachment to things English.

Larkin didn't particularly aspire to the position of national paragon. A very private man by temperament, he organized his life entirely around the compulsion to write: diaries and letters (every day), conscientious minutes from his work at the library, a monthly review of current jazz records for the London *Daily Telegraph*, novels (in youth) and poetry (increasingly seldom). Parsimonious with time and money, Larkin hoarded his private hours for writing; and he saved every scrap. At the time of his death, his estate included a quarter million pounds sterling in savings and a well-organized literary lumber room full of rather surprising treasures that were sometimes hard to distinguish from trash.

Helpfully, the biography is structured by a thesis: that Larkin "lived a much more dramatic and intense life than he let on, though it was performed on an inner stage . . . When he found his authentic voice in the late 1940's, the beautiful flowers of his poetry were already growing on long stalks out of pretty dismal ground . . . he understood that the relationship he had created between 'high' art and 'ordinary' existence was a remarkable one, which deserved to be made public." For several years of his apprenticeship, Larkin was greatly attracted to W.B. Yeats. It was Yeats who wrote about the sources of poems, "all the ladders start / In the foul rag and bone shop of the heart." Motion's life of Larkin reads like an archaeological dig at the site of this metaphor, and consistently manages to make comprehensible the unlovely elements of Larkin's character while measuring his achievements with compelling if selective empathy.

At the top of the ladder Larkin's poetry steps off to occupy its own space, free of mere dailiness. "I don't really equate poems with real-life as most people do," Larkin remarked consolingly to his lifelong girlfriend, who had detected a reference to another woman in one of his poems. "I mean they are true in a way, but very much dolled-up & censored." Larkin reserved poetry for the pursuit of authentic feeling. He observed, "a study of literature teaches . . . that it doesn't matter what you write as long as you *feel* strongly enough and *tear into it*." One aesthetic resource was his passion for jazz. Larkin's poetry of the 1950s and 1960s doesn't show a stylistic influence of jazz as does, for example, that of his American contemporaries Allen Ginsberg, LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, or Ted Joans, whose work as black artists or black-identified Beat artists attempted to codify jazz phrasing in the typography of their poems. Larkin admired the emotional stridency of jazz: "the closest description of the unconscious we have," he wrote in an unpublished essay. But he

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also admired the jazz artist as a man who worked with familiar tunes and whose techniques made the banal exciting and fresh, as Larkin tried to do in verse.

Authentic feeling, when at all expressible, is not necessarily uplifting or generous, as Larkin's poetry often demonstrates. Yet his range extends to ecstasy as well. An example can be found in the late poem "Cut Grass," where strengths gained in his youthful apprenticeships to Yeats and Hardy are summoned to combat his character faults of cynicism, self-pity, and envy. In "Cut Grass," the heaviness lifts for a moment that the poem prolongs forever. "Brief is the breath / Mown stalks exhale. / Long, long the death / It dies in the white hours / Of young-leafed June / With chestnut flowers, / With hedges snowlike strewn, / White lilac bowed, / Lost lanes of Queen Anne's lace, / And that high-builded cloud / Moving at summer's pace." Two sentences, two-beat lines gradually lengthened and loosened by unstressed syllables; a single conceit; Hardy's poetics brought to bear on Yeatsian tragic joy; but Larkin's own familiar struggle with morbidity, calmed in a scrupulous examination of something ordinary, temporary, and beautiful. Motion loyally claims to find Larkin "one of the great poets of the century." This has been a long century: Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Neruda, Celan, Stevens are names that come immediately to mind in protest, as writers of wider sympathy, greater learning, more splendid language; but never mind, Motion probably means *our* part of the century, and *his* part of the world. In any case, Larkin is not well known to American readers, and Motion's discussion of Larkin's poetry and its poetics will provide a fetching introduction.

Yet beneath the elegance of Motion's sensitive, resourceful narrative, I detect the dread of an unasked question: how much did Larkin's achievement as an artist have to do with the style of nineteen-fifties English masculinity that Larkin's way of life preserved and that his writings put abundantly on display? Every biographer is situated in some mode of social relationship to the worthy under discussion. I think Motion has chosen—somewhat unconsciously, no doubt—the most productive relation to the problem of Larkin's character: that of son and heir to *mon semblable, mon père*. In England, poetry is still pretty much a masculine enterprise. Motion does not personalize his relation to this cultural fact, but his awareness of its implications builds a tension into the narrative that the reader must necessarily share.

Motion is fascinated by a style of Englishness advanced by the postwar culture of Angry Young Men, that found wider and wider acceptance as Larkin aged into reactionary eminence. The biographer deploys no Freudian jargon, but he has thought out the psychodynamics of Larkin's creativity and its public reception. He shows how Larkin's temperament was shaped at home under the influence of a cynical, domineering father and a cleverly passive mother, and how

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Larkin's adult competence incorporated the best and the worst in these models.

Motion makes of Eva Day Larkin a pathetic figure, emblematic of the deformation of women's energies within the conventions of marriage to a certain kind of man (the kind Larkin became as well). At Eva Day's first encounter with Sydney Larkin, she is interrupted reading a book. That is the end of whatever independence of mind young Eva may have been cultivating. Within the week she and Sydney Larkin were engaged, and when we next read about her it is through the lenses of what her weak-eyed son would call his "mother complex." Widowed when Philip was twenty-six, Eva Larkin lived another thirty years. Larkin visited her at least once a month and wrote unconfiding filial letters to her several times a week. Motion argues persuasively that the feeling-tone of Larkin's miserable, dutiful attachment to his mother was fundamental to his imaginative vitality. The emotions she roused in him—a seethe of impotent rage, helpless pity, desperate boredom, stymied desire—formed the rich muck in which Larkin planted the ladder of his art.

The unconscious is formed in childhood, but character is fixed in adolescence, which lasts a long time. Motion, an Oxford man himself, is especially good at showing how Larkin's character achieved its adult contours in the company of the bookish Oxford equivalent of an American street gang. Kingsley Amis was its leader, Larkin his resourceful rival and foil; other aspiring writers (including John Wain and Bruce Montgomery/"Edmond Crispin") also took turns at being bad. Larkin's lifelong friendships with this pack of males—relationships conducted mainly in long, pushy, funny, us-against-them letters—provides oblique insights into why he never married. Most women cannot give men the kind of sadistic pleasure that boys often give each other in youth, and for some men, there is no adequate substitute.

Larkin had a monkish bachelorhood as university librarian, supported by an institution that provided lodgings, food, and the satisfactions of status in a petty hierarchy with sixty mostly female underlings. From the beginning of his career Larkin planted his solitude on a trivet of bonds with tolerant women. For most of his life, one stabilizing foot of the triangle was Eva Larkin. The second anchorage was Monica Jones, a lecturer in English at Leicester, who remained his closest companion for thirty-seven years, from 1947 until his death in 1985. But lest the arrangement with Monica collapse into marriage, Larkin always had someone on the side. Briefly, this was a married woman, Patsy Strang, to whom Larkin wrote some of his most engaging love letters; later the "other woman" was Maeve Brennan, a junior librarian at Hull. After Eva Larkin became senile and terminally ill, the vacant position was filled by Betty Mackereth, Larkin's personal secretary.

These women played out with Larkin intimacies scripted in their

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cultural moment. Monica was the Girl Who Would. Larkin's visits were apparently periods of intensely pleasurable erotic acting-out further enlivened by joint schemes of naughtiness: "gathering your great smooth hips under me and shoving into you as I felt inclined." They kept a one-upping diary of dirty talk together; and over a period of years they performed a systematic defacement of Iris Murdoch's novel *The Flight from the Enchanter*, altering nearly every page with obscenities. Maeve, a Catholic, was the Girl Who Wouldn't: she described to Andrew Motion a relationship that for over a decade remained "intense and yet technically . . . chaste." When Maeve finally yielded her virginity, Larkin moved his affections on to Betty Mackereth. As monitor of the narrow boundary that separated Larkin's private and his professional lives—Mackereth knew, for example, that he kept a stash of pornography in his office—she came as close as Larkin got to having a wife. After Eva Larkin's death at ninety, Betty's comfortable motherliness not only filled an emotional cavity but re-established a threatened stability: with Eva Larkin gone, Monica had strengthened claims to become his one-and-only, an intolerable prospect in Larkin's emotional economy.

Motion is somewhat apologetic about the ways Larkin slipped time and again from the tightening noose of matrimony with Monica and Maeve; but it's hard to see how marriage to Larkin could have improved their lives. Both women had good friends they didn't share with him, and work they liked. As it happened, their relationships to Larkin proved more stable than the marriages of Larkin's best friends, most of whom went through several wives during the years Monica and Maeve shared Larkin's life. Moreover, day-to-day proximity with Larkin would have been pretty awful, as the women had reason to know. Home from the office Larkin would have spent his time complaining, cheeseparing, drinking, playing jazz at high volume, and writing letters to other girls. Withholding himself from the women close to him was a lifelong practice ("I can toss myself off in five minutes . . . ").

Motion's biography comprehends Larkin's intimate heterosexual relationships very well; but what about his other social relations? "Keep up the cracks about niggers and wogs," he goaded Kingsley Amis; to the historian Robert Conquest, "we don't go to Test matches now, too many fucking niggers about." Larkin's attitudes were widely shared among men of his class, certainly by the distinguished friends to whom he confided them, and that was the class able to confer the rewards Larkin coveted. But Larkin could be equally scathing about other Anglo men, especially successful literary men, including Kingsley Amis. Said Larkin, "I have always taken comfort from D.H. L[awrence]'s 'You have to have something vicious in you to be a creative writer.' "

The key to the character Motion lays out in *A Writer's Life* is Larkin's use of viciousness to reinforce his solitude, and his use of solitude to

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provide the bleak conditions of his struggle to express and refine his obsessions in writing. To Patsy Strang, who had just become his mistress, Larkin commented, "These letters are a bit difficult to write, aren't they, honey? There are so many styles to avoid." For each of the men and women admitted through the curtains of his fear into a sanctum of intimacy Larkin devised a distinctive style and a panoply of tropes. With Kingsley Amis he continued college games of belching, farting and what they called "horsepissing"—replacing some words in a text with obscenities; Larkin always put "bum" at the end of his letters to Amis: e.g., "Mrs Thatcher must reconsider her bum." Letters to Robert Conquest usually contained a nook where a raincoat could be opened for furtive previews of the "no-holes-barred" pornography they exchanged. He addressed Monica Jones in an elaborate code of endearments cabbaged from Beatrix Potter; Maeve Brennan was also a small furry animal, usually a mouse.

And, as the letters and biography show us, Larkin tried to put just about *everything* into words. He segregated his writings under various kinds of cover, something like the heroine of Doris Lessing's novel *The Golden Notebook*. His diary—shredded by executor order after his death—ran to thirty bound volumes; Motion speculates that these were "a sexual log book full of masturbatory fantasies, and a repository for his rage against the world." In 1976, Larkin had begun "slowly boiling [them] down . . . the idea is that I shall then burn them," he told Conquest. Both tasks proved impossible: the diaries formed their own kind of rung above the muck, and wouldn't translate. But somebody else did the burning.

Larkin's public demeanor was polite, reserved, and funny. People loved being with him. Nonetheless, crudities isolated from his private communications are being held against him now, because of their power to diminish the character-ideal Larkin had become for the British public: an island of personality traits deduced from the speaking voice in his poems. Motion's generous, intelligent book builds causeways connecting these islands, and then maps itineraries that lead from man to poem. I do not believe this kind of work has ever been better done.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Reading Hawthorne

In 1879 Anthony Trollope published a little-known essay, "The Genius of Nathaniel Hawthorne," in which he described that genius—so much the opposite of his own. Since Hawthorne had previously praised Trollope in an oft-quoted letter as a writer whose works were "solid and substantial, written on the strength of beef and through the inspiration of ale," it was unlikely that, in return, Trollope could be truly disinterested. Still, his characterization of Hawthorne strikes the essential note, as he speaks of "that weird, mysterious, thrilling charm" permeating Hawthorne's work. No one, Trollope says justly, will feel himself immediately ennobled "for having read one of my novels." Hawthorne, on the other hand, by plunging us into melancholy enables us to catch "something of the sublimity of the transcendent, something of the mystery of the unfathomable." Indeed the effect of his work is all but to persuade us that, like that work, we too "might live to be sublime, and revel in mingled light and mystery." Hawthorne's was a mind powerful and active, also as "lop-sided" as any mind could be; his charm and appeal as a writer were inseparable from such un-Trollopian lopsidedness.

The convergence of Trollope and Hawthorne, the genuine admiration of each for the other's quite different novelistic operation, is one of the more heartening facts of literary history. The question is whether, more than a century later, Hawthorne can be read, *is* in fact read (as is Trollope most assuredly) with the pleasure and sense of gratification that attends our engagement with a living writer. In his extremely interesting and useful study of Hawthorne's continuing presence in American literature, Richard Brodhead points out that, along with Emerson, Hawthorne has always been there, has from the outset and continuously been a canonical classical presence, in fact—and unlike even Emerson—"the only major American author never to have been underestimated."[1] Yet even as we acknowledge this cultural

[1] The essential Hawthorne is now handsomely available in two volumes of The Library of America: *Tales and Sketches, A Wonder Book*, and *Tanglewood Tales* (ed. by Roy Harvey Pearce, 1493pp), and *Novels* (ed. by Millicent Bell, 1272pp). The following critical and biographical studies are briefly treated or referred to in my essay: *The School of Hawthorne*, by Richard Brodhead (New York, 1986); *In Hawthorne's Shadow: American Romance from Melville to Mailer*, by Richard Coale (Lexington, KY, 1985); *The Art of Authorial Presence: Hawthorne's Provincial Tales*, by G.R. Thompson (Durham, 1993); *The Office of the Scarlet Letter*, by Sacvan Bercovitch (Baltimore, 1991); *Practicing Romance: Narrative Form and Cultural Engagement in Hawthorne's Fiction*, by Richard Millington

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fact, something about it seems less than fully convincing. Let us ask ourselves (again with Trollope in mind as a comparative standard) how often we or anyone we know pick up Hawthorne's novels and tales out of nothing more than the itch to reread, to re-experience the thrill of fictional discovery, to rehearse again the delights of compositional mastery. When was the last time anyone except a professional student of American literature attempted *The House of the Seven Gables* or *The Blithedale Romance* or *The Marble Faun*, or even *The Scarlet Letter*, for no better reason than the pleasure of the text? Is it possible that Hawthorne's reputation is of a comparably deadly kind to that of the Ben Jonson about whom T.S. Eliot wrote so acutely in 1919: "To be universally accepted; to be damned by the praise that quenches all desire to read the book; to be afflicted by the imputation of the virtues which excite the least pleasure; and to be read only by historians and antiquaries—this is the most perfect conspiracy of approval." Thus Eliot, setting out to rescue Jonson from his seeming fate as a frozen unread classic. Hawthorne's classic status seems to be similarly hedged round with ironies and unease.

Criticism of Hawthorne pretty much begins with Henry James's brilliant monograph, published the same year as Trollope's essay and one of the most rereadable books ever written. Brodhead shows carefully what any reader of James's biography can see; that the Master gives with one hand only to take away with the other; that every positive claim he makes for Hawthorne's virtue and importance is qualified by an insistence on the impoverishment, the restriction, the unworldliness and unsophistication of that artist. Hawthorne's writing is notable for its "charm" and that charm lies in its "purity and spontaneity and naturalness of fancy"; it is almost as if a remark James makes about "Night Sketches," to the effect that it is "so light, so slight, so tenderly trivial" as to be "about nothing at all," were true—by extension—of the work generally. James found Hawthorne's mind characterized by, as it were, an absence of mind insofar as serious ideas went. Hawthorne has no "appreciable philosophy at all—no general views that were in the least uncomfortable." Indeed his mind "had no development that it is of especial importance to look into." Unlike Melville, who called Hawthorne a seer into "the blackness of darkness," James is unimpressed by the depth of his sense of sin; or it is an intellectual sense purely, not a moral or theological one, and it exists merely for artistic and literary purposes.[2] He pays tribute

(Princeton, 1992); *Salem is My Dwelling Place: The Life of Nathaniel Hawthorne*, by Edwin Haviland Miller (Iowa City, 1991).

[2] But on another occasion Melville was less certain about the issue: "Whether Hawthorne has simply availed himself of this mystical blackness as a means to the wondrous effects he makes it to produce in his lights and shades; or whether there really lurks in him, perhaps unknown to himself, a touch of Puritanic gloom,—this, I cannot altogether tell."

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to Hawthorne's imagination, which did have a development, James says, but one that seems unconnected to the use of language. It is as if the charm of his predecessor's writing were too evanescent or delicate or (in Trollope's word) sublime to be described with any reference to Hawthorne's sentences.

I am scarcely faulting James for not close reading his artist, but suggesting rather that Hawthorne is a writer whose individual sentences, paragraphs, pages, don't invite the kind of strenuous analytical response on criticism's part that (say) is demanded by *Moby Dick* or *The Wings of the Dove*. Hawthorne wouldn't have minded this in the least, since he wrote to an editor in 1851 that he never strove after "beauty" in his prose, never attempted to make it anything else than plain: "The greatest possible merit of style is, of course, to make the words absolutely disappear into the thought." Here Trollope would have agreed with him absolutely. The difference, so far as criticism of each writer goes, is that there is plenty to talk about in terms of story, character, social reference, in Trollope's thick, well-rounded fiction. For the lopsided Hawthorne, by contrast, if you decide not to make the style a subject of consideration, you may not find, much of the time, any satisfying place to rest in character, story, or social reference. Where you will be led instead is to ideas, to the deep structures and psychic resonances that have, in fact, fascinated so many of his modern critics.[3]

The "critical problem" concerning Hawthorne, then, goes something like this: He is an American classic to whom are indebted not just—as Brodhead shows—James and Howells and Faulkner (Brodhead connects *Light in August* to *The House of the Seven Gables*) but, as Frederick Coale has argued, all manner of contemporary fictionists from McCullers and O'Connor and Styron on through Cheever and Updike, John Gardner, Joyce Carol Oates, and Joan Didion. But his classical status has oddly little to do with readers, young or old, eagerly perusing him. He is kept alive rather by a steady outpouring of books and articles from the academy, of which one of the most recent, by G.R. Thompson, has this to say about perhaps Hawthorne's most popular story in the eyes of nineteenth-century readers, "The Gentle Boy":

> Psychopathology of culture: narrative pattern and frame function: Paralleling the narrative commentary at the end, the tale is preceded by a historical introduction that sets a cultural context requiring a double reading for full understanding. From a narratival perspective of exterior and interior narrative framing and commentary and non-commentary, the pattern of the narrator's intrusion into and withdrawal from the tale looks like this:

[3] Although Frederick Crews would now qualify some of the approaches in his psychological reading of Hawthorne (*Sins of the Fathers*, N.Y., 1966), it remains the boldest, most exciting interpretive study of Hawthorne's fiction.

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There follows a breakdown into the various "frames." Surely this is sound enough but does seem a rather brutal instance of how commentary has absolutely severed itself from being of interest to anyone not exclusively professional. From considering literature in terms such as Wordsworth considered poetry—as an homage to "the grand elementary principle of pleasure"—we are to analyze it rather in terms of "narratival perspective" and "frame function."

To some extent, of course, literary criticism will necessarily fail to do justice to the immediate pleasure, sentence by sentence, that falls to an absorbed reader of any imaginative artist. But Hawthorne presents special problems for someone trying to give a faithful account of what it's like to read him. Two recent (and expert) studies of him, by Sacvan Bercovitch and Richard Millington, testify nonetheless to the distance between their sophisticated interpretive accounts and what I've been speaking of, loosely, as the pleasures of a text. Bercovitch learnedly and vigorously takes it upon himself to investigate and delineate the "cultural work" done by *The Scarlet Letter* and its "far-reaching implications about the symbolic structure of the American ideology." Millington's subtitle emphasizes the "cultural engagement" of Hawthorne's work as a romancer; his account of *The House of the Seven Gables*, for example, is designed to show it as a work of "extraordinary sophistication in its account of the culture it addresses and of extraordinary ambition in its attempt to reshape that culture." His book is the best account of Hawthorne as a romancer that I know of. Still, when we put down these critical books and return merely to reading the novels in question, it takes some substantial effort to move from the immaculate surface of Hawthorne's prose to the deep cultural and symbolic resonances it has been found to possess.

My own tendency is to adopt Eliot's strategy in dealing with that other frozen unread classic, Ben Jonson. Eliot proposed that as a dramatic writer Jonson was no less a poet than Shakespeare but that, unlike Shakespeare's, his poetry was "of the surface." It had to be grasped and appreciated in its details and in their relation to one another; it did not, typically, provide us with the profundities and spiritual stirrings that Shakespeare provided us and that lesser Jacobean dramatists like Beaumont and Fletcher attempted to provide. Admittedly, nothing seems more remote from Hawthorne's mistiness and moodiness than the large, bold, vigorous activity of Jonsonian verse in *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*. Yet, as Q.D. Leavis insisted in her ambitious argument for Hawthorne's greatness ("Hawthorne as Poet"), he was a writer whose work demands the kind of concentrated attention we give to real poems. The question is, supposing that Hawthorne's poetry is of the surface, just where to direct such attention: how deep should close reading go?

Mrs. Leavis reprimanded James for patronizing Hawthorne's work by calling it charming, and she was concerned to admire it rather as

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the symbolic art of a dramatic poet who had taken Shakespeare as his mode. This seems to me too much to claim for Hawthorne since—after James and Proust—his symbolic powers, even in impressive tales like "My Kinsman, Major Molineux," or "Young Goodman Brown" or "Roger Malvin's Burial" (always singled out as examples of Hawthorne's best) are relatively minor. Nor—after Chekhov and Kafka and Virginia Woolf—do his insights as a revealing psychologist astonish us. There is always that air of quaintness, of oddity—of the strange, the out-of-the-way—that pervades the very texture of his prose; we never forget that we are *reading* something. For me at least this situation is often highly pleasurable, indeed delightful, and it's a pleasure, a delight that stubbornly resists translation into the terms of social or moral or psychological value.

Take the following instance from *The House of the Seven Gables*, a book Q.D. Leavis is very severe about ("quite uninteresting, illogical in conception and frequently trivial in execution") but which seems to me at least arguably the most varied and interesting of Hawthorne's longer works. In Chapter XI, "The Arched Window," Clifford Pyncheon is suddenly and irresistibly seized by the impulse to blow soap-bubbles, something he and his sister Hepzibah used to do when they were young. He proceeds to act on the impulse:

> Behold him, with his gray hair, and a wan, unreal smile over his countenance, where still hovered a beautiful grace, which his worst enemy must have acknowledged to be spiritual and immortal, since it had survived so long! Behold him, scattering airy spheres abroad, from the window into the street! Little, impalpable worlds, were those soap-bubbles, with the big world depicted, its hues bright as imagination, on the nothing of their surface. It was curious to see how the passers-by regarded those brilliant fantasies, as they came floating down and made the dull atmosphere imaginative, about them. Some stopped to gaze, and perhaps carried a pleasant recollection of the bubbles, onward, as far as the street-corner; some looked angrily upward, as if poor Clifford wronged them, by setting an image of beauty afloat so near their dusty pathway. A great many put out their fingers, or their walking-sticks, to touch withal, and were perversely gratified, no doubt, when the bubble, with all its pictured earth and sky scene, vanished as if it had never been.

Finally one bubble floats down and bursts against the nose of dignified Judge Pyncheon, who calls up to his cousin, "What! Still blowing soap-bubbles!" In the most recent biography of Hawthorne (a labor of love, well-executed, but why do we need another biography of Hawthorne?) Edwin Haviland Miller finds this, rightly, "a delightful and subtle scene" but then takes away its subtlety and delight by converting it into meaning: "Literally Clifford's bubble collides with Pyncheon's, or art and beauty assault materialism and ugliness.

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Psychologically . . . [the soap-bubble] is his means of attacking his betrayer and emasculator . . . Once again the Judge's sexual power is attacked when the bubble bursts on that symbolic phallus, the nose." Wouldn't it be better to say that this is *writing*, an art that—like the bubbles—is an art of surface? The sentences hover right on the edge of the cloying, the overexclamatory, the "cute"; but with the "Little, impalpable worlds" sentence Hawthorne's imagination begins to animate the world as those bubbles float down. Surely he is writing about himself here, about his life as an artist and the kinds of creation he attempts. Can we respect and admire the soap-bubbles without hastening their demise by ramming into them?

"O you man without a handle," Henry James, Sr., is supposed to have exclaimed to Emerson. My reading of Hawthorne over the past couple of months, done in a more or less amateurish spirit, while dipping into the vast critical literature that has accumulated about him, convinces me that he too is a man without a handle. Instead of moving closer to his "secret," persuading myself that I've begun to assimilate him, get a handle on him, the opposite has happened. As far as I can see, his commentators—from James and Melville and D.H. Lawrence, to Yvor Winters, F.O. Matthiessen and Harold Bloom—have called *The Scarlet Letter* a masterpiece, while conspicuously failing to provide terms for a critical appraisal which would convince a reader such was the case. Presuming that a reader needed convincing, of course. But can this work of genius (assuredly) be taken in and admired in ways at least analogous to the ways we admire *Emma* or *Middlemarch* or *Sons and Lovers*? If, as Winters claimed, it is "pure allegory" isn't that a mark against it? (James said, with some justice, that allegory never seemed to him "a first rate literary form.") As for the tales, after all that has been written about the fineness of "Young Goodman Brown," is it a literary experience obviously superior to the visual analogue in *Rosemary's Baby* or *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* or *The Stepford Wives*, modern cinematic efforts to show a protagonist struggling to avoid joining a community of evil? Is there, page by page and paragraph by paragraph, a verbal life and intensity comparable to one of James's or Hemingway's or Flannery O'Connor's short fictions? The answer to these questions, I hasten to add, is not obviously "no," but it doesn't seem to me obviously "yes" either. A lot of the time, while reading Hawthorne, we're not just sure how significant is the experience we're having.

Unlike the greatest writers, Hawthorne almost never, maybe never, touches the heart. He's as incapable of tragedy as Trollope, and perhaps that has something to do with their affinity for each other. He can be appreciated historically for his insights into and his role in creating, as Bercovitch calls it, American ideology. But as far as the tales go, those like "The Maypole of Merry Mount" or "Endicott and the Red Cross," or "The Grey Champion," though they can justly be called successful attempts (the only ones, James said) at historical

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fiction, have beyond that no stronger claim on our attention or affections. Allegorical tales like "The Minister's Black Veil," "The Prophetic Pictures," "The Birth-Mark," "Egotism; or, the Bosom-Serpent," "Earth's Holocaust," and "The Christmas Banquet" have their strengths, are impressively done, but don't, at least for me, grow richer and more various upon rereading. Even relatively expansive efforts like "Rappacini's Daughter" and "Ethan Brand" feel essentially claustrophobic, lacking in the free creative play found in the highest art. Hawthorne never let a story run away with him, but kept his characters as closely under his thumb as Nabokov did. Do we really *care* about any of these simulated lives? Shouldn't we, sometimes, just a little? To my judgment he is at his best in two of the very shortest tales—"Wives of the Dead" and "Wakefield"—where the imaginative treatment is most bizarre and undidactic; also appealing are the ones in which he's outrageously "humorous" and tall-taleish—as in "Mr. Higginbotham's Catastrophe" and "Peter Goldthwaite's Treasure" (and, in its way, "My Kinsman, Major Molineux"). Some of the sketches, like "Our Visit to Niagara," "Chippings with a Chisel," and "Snow-Flakes" have their mild but distinct satisfactions.

"This is the real charm of Hawthorne's writing—this purity and spontaneity and naturalness of fancy"—I realize I'm doing little more than echoing James's impressionistic terms for expressing what he found valuable and enduring in Hawthorne. But I would account for much of what's good about *The House of the Seven Gables* in similar terms. Whether it all goes together in a dramatically compelling way (I don't think it does), there's no denying how indelibly it renders—again in James's words—"the impression of a summer afternoon in an elm-shadowed New England town." He succeeded, said Mark Van Doren in what is still the best introduction to Hawthorne (*Nathaniel Hawthorne*, 1949), "by lavishing all of his gift upon a picture." Surely he is our American master of the picturesque, and it is invariably a picturesque laced with humor. This can be illustrated by three or four pages in *The Blithedale Romance* for which I'd gladly trade the rest of that irritating book. In those pages, the impossible hero, Miles Coverdale, goes to a saloon to meet Old Moodie so he can find out more about Priscilla (herself an impossible heroine). But first Hawthorne has Coverdale light a cigar and speculate on the "boozy kind of pleasure in the customary life that was going forward." (Hawthorne almost always has a good word to say for taverns and for the activity of what's here called "tippling.") We view various pictures on the walls—of a beefsteak, of cheeses, of revelers "drinking their wine out of fantastic, long-stemmed glasses; quaffing joyously, quaffing forever, with inaudible laughter and song; while the champagne bubbled immortally against their moustaches, or the purple tide of Burgundy ran inexhaustibly down their throats." Then we view the two bartenders, one of them a magnificent concocter of "gin-cocktails," and are introduced to the "staunch, old soakers" who fill

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the saloon. When eventually Hawthorne gets back to unfolding his romance, things become much less lively and intelligent. And surely *The Marble Faun* is most alive not when its preposterous figures are spouting deep thoughts about art and death, but when Hawthorne gives us the Piazza del Popolo, or walks us along the Pincian or the Borghese Gardens.

His finest achievement in humorous picturesque poetry of the surface, and a book which should be known much more than it is, is *Our Old Home* (1863), the fruit of his years spent in England at the United States Consulate in Liverpool. Its introductory chapter, "Consular Experiences," ranks with the Custom House introductory to *The Scarlet Letter* and his preface to *Mosses from an Old Manse*, as Hawthorne's finest efforts in the informal reflective mode, dense with comic seasoning. There are wonderful portraits of life at Leamington Spa, Warwick Castle, Old Boston, the haunts of Liverpool's poor, and (in "A London Suburb") his own garden, where, after praising the English garden for all the facilities it offered "for repose and enjoyment"—its arbors and garden-seats, its flowers, and all the "exuberance of English verdure," which he admits is superior to that of his native land—he concludes a paragraph with this very Hawthornesque observation:

> Loyally anxious for the credit of my own country, it gratified me to observe what trouble and pains the English gardeners are fain to throw away in producing a few sour plums and abortive pears and apples—as, for example, in this very garden, where a row of unhappy trees were spread out perfectly flat against a brick wall, looking as if impaled alive, or crucified, with a cruel and unattainable purpose of compelling them to produce rich fruit by torture. For my part, I never ate an English fruit, raised in the open air, that could compare in flavor with a Yankee turnip.

This is exquisite and funny, but it also sustains Mark Van Doren's strong tribute to his genius: "He was so alone, so aloof, because he found so few around him whose seriousness equaled his; and by seriousness he meant the real thing, a thing consistent with irony and love, a thing indeed for which comedy might be as suitable an expression as tragedy." A good deal more suitable, I'd say, for it's in his pervasive and sometimes perverse comedy that the genius shows itself most distinctly. The narrator of one of his late unfinished tales, "Septimius Felton," surely spoke for Hawthorne when he opined that "old age is something like the feeling as if you had a cold for the rest of your life." It's this note of chill drollery that's there even in *The Scarlet Letter*, which permeates the Italian notebooks and the American ones, and which makes Hawthorne at his best—that is, at his most readable—as flavorful as a Yankee turnip, if you like that sort of thing.

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ROBERT PHILLIPS

Five Women and One Man

I MUST CONFESS I'D NEVER READ Sue Miller's fiction before. It may be the titles of her books were off-putting, especially *The Good Mother* and *Family Pictures*. They reminded me of what used to be called "women's magazine fiction," slick and unsatisfying. Or perhaps the name under which she writes threw me. (*Question*: How many important novelists are there named Sue? *Answer*: One. Eugène Sue.) Would I, I wonder, have taken more interest if she wrote as Suzanne Rodham Miller, or Sue Bader Miller?

In either event, I admit to experiencing delight in finally having discovered the fiction of Sue Miller. *For Love*[1] is a mature, thought-provoking, and psychologically insightful novel. Miller, like Henry James, seems to be one on whom nothing is lost. Various incidents and crises in the novel's plot cause her protagonist Lottie Gardner to reflect acutely upon where she has been and where she is going. She interacts, over the course of one summer, with her brother Cameron, their childhood friend Elizabeth, her son Ryan, and her new husband Jack. These are all educated people. They have read Freud. And they speak sentences such as, "You're the only person I know for whom death is an aphrodisiac," and, "Boy, the pheromones are fierce tonight."

Miller can get away with this because she totally enters the world of her characters' imaginations. The former remark, for instance—seemingly flippant—when examined proves to be the pattern of Lottie's life. She had met Jack indirectly as a result of her own breast cancer, his wife Evelyn's death had given him to her at last, and the accidental death of a babysitter (Jessica) had caused her reconciliation with Jack. In ways she does indeed seem motivated by deaths.

The title, *For Love*, is a very good one for this novel, which explores the various things we are willing to do for love, both romantic and familial, at various times in our lives. Miller knows the life we all want or dream of at seventeen, or twenty-two, is very different from that of someone in his or her sixties, and one of the unusual aspects of this novel is its examination of love among individuals well into middle-age. Love in various aspects is examined as well: Cameron is blindly in love with Elizabeth, Elizabeth is in love with herself, even the dog

[1] FOR LOVE, by *Sue Miller*. HarperCollins. $23.00.

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Bader is in love with Lottie. Lottie, on the other hand, comes to accept that she is one who will live only occasionally happily ever after.

In addition to her characters' running the gamut of affections from lust to love, Miller buttresses her novel with appropriate literary allusions, from Twain to Tolstoy to Flaubert. (Twain called marriage the supreme "felicity" and also the supreme "tragedy." The deeper the love, the surer the tragedy and more painful when it comes.) Miller's prose is even laced with visual allusions to love: "Her wet pubic hair is pulled to a point between her legs by the water, like the point of an old-fashioned valentine heart."

What Lottie learns over the long hard summer is that she can pretend she can continue with her second marriage, and it just might work; and she will never know her brother at all. Her reality is totally different from his. The entire time she thought he was upset over Jessica's death he was in fact focussed upon his passion for Elizabeth. There was a time when I thought Iris Murdoch wrote wonderful novels about love, and I suppose she did, before the formulaic writing set in, when she began to pair together the least likely individuals—the crone with the youth, the vicar with the tart, the leading man with the troll, what have you. She made her point, over and over, that lovers choose unpredictable mates. Miller examines love from more complicated perspectives—love as a feeling; love as a choice; love as grace versus love as works; love as Twain's felicity versus love as grief. *For Love* is a wonderful novel, and I look forward to reading everything Sue Miller has written.

Possession, A. S. Byatt's long (556 pp.) novel, was an enormous success in 1990, winner of England's Booker Prize and named one of the "best books of the year" by *The New York Times Book Review*. It was the tale of two present-day scholars researching the lives of two Victorian poets, written in language which evoked the lush detailed images of paintings by the likes of Sir Edward Burne-Jones. *Angels & Insects*,[2] a collection of two novellas by Byatt, does not begin in the twentieth century, but is set totally in the mid-nineteenth. The first, "Morpho Eugenia," turns the traditional Gothic novel upside down, with the male held hostage by the female in a great house. It involves the Victorian obsession with Darwinian theories of breeding and sexuality, when an entomologist studies ant colonies and finds shocking parallels between their behavior and that of the family into which he has married.

Once again Byatt's language is almost monstrously rich. So much so, at times, one cannot be sure if she intends the work as a parody. The attire of every female is intricately described: "She was wearing white muslin, with cherry-red ribbons and bow, and a cherry-red sash"; "Enid was the youngest . . . wearing blush-pink organdie

[2] ANGELS & INSECTS, by *A. S. Byatt*. Random House. $21.00.

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trimmed with white rosebuds, and a wreath of rosebuds and a net of rosy ribbons in her hair. . . ." The women themselves are described in no less detail: "Her shoulders and bust rose white and flawless from the froth of tulle and tarlatan like Aphrodite from the foam"; "Her soft mouth was a little open. He could see the wet, evenly milky teeth"; "She was white all over. Even her nipples must be white." For all her verbal dexterity, Byatt frequently falls into cliché, as when her heroine's eyes become "blue pools" or "limpid blue." At times, one suspects one is reading nothing but a bodice-ripper—but Byatt lays on the symbolism so heavily, one is signalled, instead, that this is "Literature." When she sets out to draw parallels between the insect and the human worlds, she does so with a trowel: "Here we men wear carapaces like black beetles. And you ladies are like a flower garden in full flight"; "His daughters lay beside her in a basket, like two eggs in a box"; and then there is a description of his mother-in-law, disproportionately gross like a Queen Bee. But Byatt's literary offenses are not limited to lack of subtlety. At times her poor grammar is shocking: "Everyone had their place and their way of life . . ."; "Everyone does survive their marriage night, he thought."

The second novella, "The Conjugal Angel," is less overwrought, but no less overwritten: "The sun was setting on the grey water, a great dusky rose disk, the colour of a new burn-mark, in a bath of ruddy gold light poured between the bars of steely cloud, like firelight from a polished grate." Now *really*. In her passion for modification, the author has used no fewer than nine adjectives in one sentence—a practice any teacher of Freshman Composition would discourage. The plot involves a circle of Victorian Spiritualists, including Alfred, Lord Tennyson's sister Emily, who in her youth had been engaged to Arthur Hallam, the figure made immortal by Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. Since Byatt seems determined to out-Murdoch Iris Murdoch with her own strange couplings, it should not surprise to discover during the unfolding of the novella that Tennyson's feelings for Hallam were not totally pure. The tale examines Victorian conventions of loss and mourning and the expectations of society. And like the first novella, it drips with descriptions of what every woman in the story is wearing: "Lilian Papagay . . . wore wine-dark silk with a flounced train and a hat with darkly gleaming plumage, jet-black, emerald-shot, iridescent dragonfly blue on ultramarine, plump shoulders of headless wings with jaunty tail feathers like the little wings that fluttered on the hat or the heels of Hermes in old pictures . . ." It is all too much. I simply cannot Byatt.

To go from A. S. Byatt to Judy Troy is to go from a groaning smorgasbord to a diet of bread and water. In the spareness of her descriptions and plots, Ms. Troy leaves us crying for more. She is clearly following in the footsteps of the Minimalists—Barthelme, Beattie, Hempel, et al. In one story, for instance, a girl's Uncle Phil gives her a cat for a graduation present: " 'This is really cool,' Jodi

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says. She picks up the cat and kneels down to show it to Duane. 'It's really a great present, Uncle Phil.' " I'm sure it is—but wouldn't it be nice if the reader could *see* that cat? What color is it? How big is it? Is it handsome or ugly? Longhair or short? Male or female? Pedigreed or alley? It remains simply "the cat," and "really cool," just as many of her characters remain the mother, the uncle, the grandfather, the daughter—generic characters in near-generic stories. At her worst the closest Troy comes to description or individualization is when she drops brand names, as if her characters are created through their relation to a consumer environment. Flipping through *Mourning Doves*[3] the reader encounters K-Mart, 7-Eleven, Howard Johnson's, Sears, Toys 'R Us, Frederick's of Hollywood, Nintendo, Denny's, Tasti-Freeze and more; personalities include Neil Sedaka, Wayne Newton, Dwight Yoakum, Kriss Kross, and Patsy Cline. Films watched include *Gnaw: Food of the Gods II* ("a horror movie about giant rats"), and "Star Trek" reruns. It comes as no surprise when one lonely boy climbs to the top of the town water tower and threatens to jump—if he doesn't get a TV and a VCR for his room.

At her best, Troy is capable of placing her near-hopeless characters into situations in which they achieve an epiphany, a rare glimpse at the reality of their lives. This happens three times in the group which opens the book, "The Florida Stories," when the young narrator realizes her nomadic parents were not going to be any happier in Florida than they had been in South Bend; when she accepts that her father is dead, but she can live her life without him; and when she decides to return to Florida when she is older, so that she finally can stay in one place her whole life. These are by far the most satisfying and convincing stories in the collection. One suspects they may be the most autobiographical. The last section, "Venus, Kansas," is nearly as good, describing the affairs of two dysfunctional families. (Nobody in this book is happily married or living with one's spouse, it seems.) The characters accept that they married losers, they will accept unhappiness if it is the only feeling they can experience. One adulterous couple drive out to the country in her old car and make love in the back seat "among a bunch of comic books and an abandoned shoe and a lot of other things—things somebody will love you for, Holly thought, if you're lucky enough to be loved."

It is in the twelve stories of the middle section that Troy settles for underdeveloped characters and plots. Consequently her epiphanies seem unearned and heavy-handed, as when one character presumably realizes "they had both escaped the worst possibility in life: that of living with someone you don't love, or who doesn't love you. Outside of that, she believed, and except for death, you could conquer anything." Only two stories in this section, "Fidelity" and

[3] MOURNING DOVES, by *Judy Troy*. Charles Scribner's Sons. $20.00.

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"Birthday," are totally convincing. But it should be noted that eight stories in this collection were published in *The New Yorker*. Ms. Troy's fiction is convincing somebody.

When *The Quest for Christa T* was published in 1970, I recall discussing with friends the brilliance of this new "girl" writing in Germany. Her jacket photograph seemed to depict a teenager. It is with some surprise one realizes that Christa Wolf is sixty-four today, the author of seven books, and that the new photographs resemble Golda Meir. *What Remains*[4] purports to collect her short fiction, from the early work in the 1960s to the title story, recently published in Germany and the subject of some debate there. (Strangely missing from this collected stories is "Divided Heaven," Wolf's long story published in 1963, about a working woman who prefers East Germany to the supposedly more easy life in West Berlin.) In addition to that omission, the editors and/or translators have not provided dates for the eight collected pieces, which span thirty years. Dates would be of especial interest in the case of a writer so engaged in social and political commentary.

What Remains is an uneven volume, but collectively it poses questions about survival and existence. The best story, "Unter den Linden," is a leisurely, almost rambling, tale of self-discovery which occurs on a walk down the famous *strasse*, and begins, "I have always liked walking along unter den Linden. And most of all, as you well know, alone . . ." The story is a mixture of dream, reverie, and revelation. At the conclusion the narrator realizes the woman she has encountered on her stroll is herself: "It was I. It had been myself, none other than myself, whom I had met . . ." She had been intended to find herself once and for all, and the revelation is totally self-liberating for the repressed narrator. The story is at once fine fiction and a feminist tract.

"Exchanging Glances" is another admirable story, also about liberation, but an entirely different kind. An older woman writer engages in memories of the day Germany was liberated by the Allies in 1945. Wolf captures all the uncertainty, confusion, relief and humiliation: "The world consisted of the victors and the defeated. The former were free to express their emotions. The latter—us—had to lock them inside ourselves from now on. The enemy should not see us weak." The story poses questions of the need to specify exactly what one has been "liberated" from, and to what purpose as well.

The third important story, or so it seems to me, is the apparently autobiographical title piece. It concerns a writer's frame of mind when she knows she is under surveillance by the secret police. The tone veers from frustration to despair to high humor: "I still regretted the fact that I hadn't followed my first impulse right away back then

[4] WHAT REMAINS AND OTHER STORIES, by *Christa Wolf*. Trans. by *Heike Schwarzbauer* and *Rick Tavvorian*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $25.00.

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when it started, on those cold November nights, and brought them down some hot tea." As her personal history unfolds, so does the history of the city of Berlin: "The city had turned from a place into a non-place, without history, without vision, without magic, spoiled by greed, power, and violence. It divided its time between nightmares and senseless activities . . . ," like the three men who sat in a car every day watching her apartment. For Wolf those secret police came to symbolize the new Berlin.

Other stories are less successful, particularly Wolf's efforts at speculative fiction. In "A Little Outing to H.," the narrator visits Herotown, where ordinary residents wear orange badges inscribed with the letter P (for Person), while those who wear no badges at all are Heroes. It barely works. "Self-Experiment" is a witty fantasy in which a woman subjects herself to a sex change, only to reverse the procedure when she discovers she was not able to shed the sensations of womanhood when she became a man. She comes to be homesick for the absurdities of being a woman. While the plot allows for some neat satire on the sexes—and the sexism of males—it remains decidedly slick. (But not so slick as another story, narrated by a cat.)

Despite lapses, it is good to have Christa Wolf's shorter fiction in one volume and in English. The translation by Heike Schwarzbauer and Rick Tavvorian is bright and fluent. One wishes they had provided a few intercultural notes, such as one to explain why the narrator of "What Remains" finds it so hilarious that a "Jewess" be named "Elfi."

Some writers of short stories have a penchant for the surprise ending—conclusions that seem to come out of nowhere, because the author has withheld information from the reader until the last paragraph: stories in which we finally find out the narrator is a dog, for instance, or that all the action has been occurring within a dream. Some readers call these "trick endings" and feel cheated. They feel the endings have not been earned by the writing which precedes them. Yet de Maupassant and O. Henry managed to write some effective tales with surprises at the end, as did Saki.

Amy Bloom does not write stories with surprise endings, but her stories always surprise, often more than once, in the telling. Each story in *Come to Me*[5] is unpredictable, as unpredictable and individual as people are. Perhaps because she is a psychotherapist by profession, Bloom is quite comfortable with the odd, the perverse, even the forbidden. Her deviants are basically people like you and me, only their needs to be loved or appreciated are more open or more extreme. Consequently her plots involve a ménage à trois, a case of near-incest, pedophilia, manslaughter, psychosis and transsexuality—as well as more "normal" actions, such as adultery and revenge. Not all

[5] COME TO ME, by *Amy Bloom*. HarperCollins. $20.00.

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of her stories focus on the abnormal. "Song of Solomon" involves an unmarried mother and her quiet resolve to snare the obstetrician who delivered her baby. Both seem very ordinary, people who are in need of a partner. The fact that he is much older and of a different religion places no barriers between them. The story largely is told through the point-of-view of the young mother, Kate. But near the end Bloom switches to the omniscient eye, and in one paragraph throws light on both lives:

> They squinted at each other in the September light, smiling and wondering what the other person saw. Dr. Sheldon thought Kate saw a pallid, overweight man sweating in an old navy blue suit, black-rimmed glasses sliding halfway down his big nose and wild curls floating around his bald spot. She didn't; she saw God. Kate thought he saw a slightly crazy woman, wild with exhaustion and loneliness, but he didn't see that. He saw that her dark blue eyes lit up when they rested on his face and that her hand lay tenderly, unconsciously, on his sleeve, like a lily. He saw that their house would have white flowers and bright plastic toys on the floor. He would not be alone.

I call this a little miracle in economy and insight, and it is accomplished all by point-of-view. In this manner Bloom's narratives vary considerably. They are told by, or are about, children, adults of both sexes, octogenarians, patients and doctors, blacks and whites, straights and gays. Her range is wide, yet the voices always strike the right note. I have only one quibble: I don't know why Bloom titled the book *Come to Me*; that is not the title of any of the dozen stories. It works, I suppose, because everyone in the book is looking for someone else. But Bloom could have done better. It's a small fault in a fine collection by someone said not to have written a story until five years ago. That makes Bloom (b. 1953) a real late bloomer.

Peter Taylor (b. 1917) has published thirteen books in his long and distinguished career. Two of them are novels, sort of. *A Woman of Means* (1950), about 35,000 words, was more of a novelette than a novel, written in the style of a conversation and without subplots, all pivoting on a single family situation. *A Summons to Memphis* (1986), at slightly over 200 pages, is more satisfying novelistically, at least in heft. In content it has about the same number of characters and covers about the same time span as many of Taylor's stories. It is, perhaps, "a story that got out of hand," as he said in one interview.

Two of Taylor's collections contain dramas, *A Stand in the Mountains* (1985) and *Presences: Seven Dramatic Pieces* (1973). The latter was probably Taylor's least-reviewed trade book. Yet it contains the key to the direction in which his later fiction has led. Rather than being nourished by the larger novelistic form, Taylor obviously has been influenced by the fantasies of ghost stories, especially those of Henry

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James and Edith Wharton. Almost every story or dramatic piece in *The Oracle at Stoneleigh Court*[6] deals with a fourth or fifth dimension, the past or the future, in which we must face the person we could have been but have not become, or the prospect of reconciling with, in the hereafter, those we found on earth to be unreconcilable. The major influence I would judge was Henry James's "The Jolly Corner." Its outlines are found in *Missing Person*, from *Presences*, a play about narrow lives and missed opportunities, and the theme is repeated here in "The Real Ghost." Nearly all the stories in the volume deal with ghostly influences from the past. Those that do not are not among Taylor's recent work. While the volume carries the single copyright date of 1993, some detective work would reveal that certain pieces were written much earlier. "The End of Play" was published in *Virginia Quarterly Review* in 1965, and "Nerves" in *The New Yorker* in 1961—over three decades prior to this "new" collection.

This is not to indicate that Taylor is scraping the bottom of the barrel. He always has bided his time in deciding when a work will be gathered into a book. But it is a tribute to his development that the most recent stories collected here are the best. These include the title novella, concerning the influence of an elderly widow with unearthly powers over her weak nephew and an ambitious young woman; "The Witch of Owl Mountain Springs," a tale of revenge over betrayed love; and my particular favorite, "The Decline and Fall of the Episcopal Church (in the Year of Our Lord 1952)," in which a purloined baptismal font from a razed church becomes a birdbath on a secular lawn. The birdbath font comes to symbolize the loss of faith, tradition and values in our time. Mr. Thurston Roundtree, sole survivor of the old Episcopalians in the town, is forced to confront painful changes during his lifetime.

All these stories are told with grace and wit, and employ such wonderful old-fashioned words as scrupulosity, abstemious, constabulary, and contumelious. It is ironic that the three one-act plays which conclude the book are not as rewarding as the stories which precede them, for it is Taylor's pursuit of the ghost play and James which have produced this remarkable late flowering of fiction. But he is not the first American fiction writer to have failed as playwright—James, Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Vonnegut, Styron and Baldwin among them—and surely he won't be the last.

[6] THE ORACLE AT STONELEIGH COURT, by *Peter Taylor*. Alfred A. Knopf. $22.50.

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BRIAN COX

Said's Global Consciousness

In his 1993 Reith Lectures for the BBC in London (printed by the *Independent* from June 24 to July 29), Edward Said argued that the intellectual today ought to be an amateur. He defines amateurism as an activity that is fuelled by care and affection rather than by profit. For Said an intellectual is someone "who considers that to be a thinking and concerned member of a society one is entitled to raise moral issues at the heart of even the most technical and professionalized activity as it involves one's country, its power, its mode of interacting with its citizens as well as other societies." The intellectual's spirit as an amateur, Said continues, "can enter and transform the merely professional routine most of us go through into something much more lively and radical; instead of doing what one is supposed to do one can ask why one does it, who benefits from it, how it can reconnect with a personal project and original thought."

Said makes a bitter attack on the "professionalism" of university academics; today's intellectual, he suggests, is more likely to be a closeted literature professor, with a secure income and no interest in dealing with the world outside the classroom. He quotes with approval Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals*, published in the last years of Reagan's presidency, where it was alleged that "the non-academic intellectual had completely disappeared, leaving no one in that place except a bunch of timid and jargon-ridden university dons, to whom no one in the society paid any attention." The higher one goes in the education system today, the more one is limited to a relatively narrow area of knowledge. University academics have become "tame," sacrificing originality and the excitement of discovery to a safe professionalism. They are afraid of appearing too political, of seeming controversial, for their careers depend on authorities who expect them to be balanced, objective, moderate. A habit of avoidance is cultivated; for Said this is a dangerous form of corruption.

Said insists that the intellectual must accept his or her public role, must take up a position on the public stage, testifying. Intellectual representations depend on a kind of consciousness which is "sceptical, engaged, unremittingly devoted to rational investigation and moral judgment, and this puts the individual on record and on the line." This does not mean opposition for opposition's sake: "But it does mean asking questions, making distinctions, restoring to memory all those things that tend to be overlooked or walked past in the rush to

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collective judgment and action." Said considers this activity to be particularly relevant today in countries such as the United States, Britain, France and Germany where the very idea of national identity is being openly contested for its insufficiencies, not just by intellectuals but by demographic reality. The new immigrant communities, excluded from the old ideas of national identity, are demanding, in Aimé Césaire's words, "a place at the rendezvous of victory." The current debate about the canon of great books reflects an unstable intellectual attitude towards national symbols, hallowed traditions and previously unassailable ideas.

The arguments in the Reith Lectures are interwoven throughout Said's new book, *Culture and Imperialism*.[1] He writes: "So pervasive has the professionalization of intellectual life become that the sense of vocation, as Julien Benda described it for the intellectual, has been almost swallowed up." The American university has "defanged" its academics: "Jargons of an almost unimaginable rebarbativeness dominate their style. Cults like post-modernism, discourse analysis, New Historicism, deconstruction, neo-pragmatism transport them into the country of the blue; an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history and individual responsibility fritters away attention to public matters, and to public discourse."

Culture and Imperialism exemplifies both the virtues and problems associated with this belief that the intellectual must assume a public and political role. In his Reith Lectures, Said contemplates his difficulties as he tries to tell the truth about his society: "the intellectual always stands between loneliness and alignment." In his loneliness Said on occasion seems too assertive, too repetitious and polemical, particularly in his attacks on the United States. In his alignments he appears at times too prejudiced, too committed. But this is undoubtedly a book of considerable brilliance, full of acute perceptions and challenging argument. He is surely right to emphasize the tame professionalism of much academic writing today. A vacuum has been created in which politicians in Western countries seem increasingly cut off from intellectual debate, too responsive to media pressures, often out of touch with the real problems of their communities. *Culture and Imperialism*, together with his Reith Lectures, ought to persuade university teachers to rethink how they should respond to what Said calls "the quasi-utopian space" of the Western university, "in which reflection and research can go on, albeit under new constraints and pressures."

In *Culture and Imperialism* Said demonstrates with considerable subtlety how narratives, such as classical fiction by Jane Austen, Dickens, Conrad, Kipling or Camus, or operas such as Verdi's *Aïda*, are used to assert national identity. The power to narrate, or to block

[1] CULTURE AND IMPERIALISM, by *Edward Said*. Alfred A. Knopf. $25.00.

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other narratives from forming and emerging, is a crucial method by which imperialists impose their powerful, all-conquering value systems. For centuries it has been implicit in such imperialist discourse that non-Western peoples are not like us, are naturally inferior, and deserve to be ruled. The imperialist view became so ingrained that it blinded Western readers to other cultures, other histories. In the twentieth century, newly empowered voices—Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiongo, Salman Rushdie, Gabriel García Márquez—have demanded that their narratives be heard, that the separatist and chauvinistic discourses of Western imperialism be overthrown.

Said hopes that he may be able to mediate between the Western and non-Western worlds. He insists, with examples from his personal life, on the overlapping experience of Westerners and non-Westerners, and he opposes nationalist narratives of any kind. His book is of immense importance because it challenges all static concepts of national identity, the barren dogmatism of "us" and "them" which vitiates so much political discourse from both West and non-West. His aim is to assist in the development of a new intellectual and political conscience. New alignments are being made across borders, types and nations. In Britain in 1991 right-wing traditionalists took over the national curriculum for English, reasserting the values of nationhood fashionable in the 1930s and before. The arguments, which have created damaging controversy throughout the school system, reflect those in the United States over the status of the literary canon and over what constitutes "our" tradition. Said writes: "trying to say that this or that book is (or is not) part of 'our' tradition is one of the most debilitating exercises imaginable. . . . I have no patience with the position that 'we' should only or mainly be concerned with what is 'ours,' any more than I can condone reactions to such a view that require Arabs to read Arab books, use Arab methods, and the like." The battle in the United States today, as Said sees it, is between "advocates of a unitary identity and those who see the whole as a complex but not reductively unified one. This opposition implies two different perspectives, two historiographies, one linear and subsuming, the other contrapuntal and often nomadic." For Said only the second perspective is fully sensitive to the reality of historical experience, to the demographic and cultural shifts of the latter half of the twentieth century. Said looks to a future in which we shall see the development of a new global consciousness.

To support his thesis Said provides a series of detailed analyses of famous novels to illustrate how at the heart of European culture during the many decades of imperial expansion lay an unrelenting Eurocentrism. Writers such as Jane Austen or Dickens simply took for granted that what was abroad, the foreign, the Other, was of less significance than Western culture. Acceptance of imperialist rule is implied by what is excluded. In *Mansfield Park* Thomas Bertram's slave plantation in Antigua is necessary to the poise and beauty of

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Mansfield Park. Said argues that "the right to colonial possessions helps directly to establish social order and moral priorities at home," and that in the novel the agonies of Caribbean existence are sublimated to a mere half-dozen passing references to Antigua. Austen's cultural values acquire their authority by the devaluation and exploitation of outlying colonial possessions; the unimportance of colonial workers and slaves is implied by the way great writers remove their sufferings from consciousness. In many Dickens novels businessmen, such as Dombey and Quilp, profit from connections with Empire. In Forster's *Howards End*, Henry Wilcox and his family are colonial rubber growers. Said points out that in Lionel Trilling's fine book on Forster this is not mentioned, and that even Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society* does not deal with the imperial experience at all. The problems of non-Westerners are shut out of consciousness; Said urges us to read both Austen and Fanon, to acknowledge the interdependence of West and non-West cultures.

Said's book must be taken into account in all future interpretations of the English classics; his writings have helped to bring about a major shift of consciousness in Western societies. But his interpretations of individual works seem to me at times to have been simplified to fit his thesis, to be insufficiently responsive to the complexities of novels such as *Heart of Darkness* or Camus's *L'Etranger*.

Said acknowledges that most readings of *Heart of Darkness* rightly call attention to Conrad's skepticism about the colonial enterprise. But, Said continues, "they rarely remark that in telling the story of his African journey Marlow repeats and confirms Kurtz's: restoring Africa to European hegemony by historicizing and narrating its strangeness." Said's prejudice spills over in a paragraph which seems to me a complete misreading of the text: "Conrad's readers of the time were not expected to ask about or concern themselves with what became of the natives. What mattered to them was how Marlow makes sense of everything, for without his deliberately fashioned narrative there is no history worth telling, no fiction worth entertaining, no authority worth consulting. This is a short step away from King Leopold's account of his International Congo Association, 'rendering lasting and disinterested services to the cause of progress,' and described by one admirer in 1885 as the 'noblest and most self-sacrificing scheme of African development that has ever been or ever will be attempted.'"

These statements seem surprisingly inappropriate when we recall Conrad's descriptions of the sufferings of the natives in chain gangs and in the grove of death: "They were dying slowly—it was very clear. . . . One, with his chin propped on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner: his brother phantom rested its forehead, as if overcome with a great weariness; and all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence." Marlow says he was "horror-struck."

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Conrad's own horror at what became of the natives is a central and powerful component of this complex novel. Something has gone very wrong with an interpretation which finds only a short step from King Leopold's discourses to those of Conrad.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's wandering narrative does not control and master the Africans; he remains until the end ambiguous and contradictory. Said shows little sympathy for the metaphysical blackness at the heart of Conrad's vision. In similar fashion, Said discounts the importance of the pessimistic existentialism of Camus or the Platonism of Yeats. Everything in Said's interpretation is linked to the specific locale, to the specific context of culture and imperialism. He writes: "Camus's novels and stories thus very precisely distill the traditions, idioms and discursive strategies of France's appropriation of Algeria," and that "Meursault's suicidal self-acknowledgement can have emerged only out of that specific history and that specific community." Modernism for Said is invariably a response to the external pressures on culture from the imperium. He does not accept that Camus's fictions can be read as parables of the human condition, that the Algerian locale is to some degree incidental to the pressing moral issues. Similarly, in his analysis of Yeats's great poems he gives primacy to the Irish question, rather than to the conflict between Platonic aspirations and fury at the decay of the body.

Said repeatedly asserts that the failure of Austen or Conrad or Camus to deal properly with the degradation of the natives, the implicit acceptance of imperial rule, is not blameworthy. Their omissions reflect the structures of feeling of their times, and do not diminish their greatness as artists. This is a difficult stance for him to adopt. Many readers may feel that acceptance of his arguments does diminish these writers, and that Austen and Conrad and Camus achieve greatness through insights into moral dilemmas which are not confined to any specific locale.

Although at times Said presses his case too hard, he is continually original and exciting to read. He very rightly objects to the self-righteous discourses of the British during the time of Empire and of the United States today in its dealings with non-Western countries. He goes too far on certain occasions when he tries to involve great humanist writers with this narrow-minded imperialism. His own imagination and generosity and openness of mind reflect similar qualities in the great writers he studies.

This openness makes his book important in our present political struggles. Said certainly satisfies his own definition of the intellectual by courageously taking up a position on the public stage, testifying. He attacks Allan Bloom and his followers, "intellectuals who consider the appearance in the academic world of women, African-Americans, gays and Native Americans, all of them speaking with genuine multiculturalism and new knowledge, as a barbaric threat to 'Western Civilization.'" He argues that his readings of literature must be

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related to national life—to the media, political economy, mass institutions: "texts are protean things: they are tied to circumstances and to politics large and small, and these require attention and criticism." He moves criticism forward into what he calls "global analysis, in which texts and worldly institutions are seen working together, in which Dickens and Thackeray as London authors are read also as writers whose historical experience is informed by the colonial enterprises in India and Australia of which they were so aware, and in which the literature of one commonwealth is involved in the literatures of others. Separatist or nativist enterprises" he says, "strike me as exhausted; the ecology of literature's new and expanded meaning cannot be attached to only one essence or to the discrete idea of one thing."

Culture and Imperialism may be flawed and at times repetitious, but it incorporates a vision which could enrich and revitalize the universities. In his last paragraph he writes: "No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about. Survival in fact is about the connections between things; in Eliot's phrase, reality cannot be deprived of the 'other echoes (that) inhabit the garden.' It is more rewarding—and more difficult—to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about 'us.' But this also means not trying to rule others, not trying to classify them or put them in hierarchies, above all, not constantly reiterating how 'our' culture or country is number one (or *not* number one, for that matter). For the intellectual there is quite enough of value to do without *that*."

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

LOUIS SIMPSON's memoirs, *The King My Father's Wreck*, and a book of new poems, are scheduled for publication by the Story Line Press. *Ships Going into the Blue*, his "Essays and Notes on Poetry," will be published by the University of Michigan Press. . . . THOMAS M. DISCH's latest novel, *The Priest: A Gothic Romance*, is due out soon from Knopf. Recently he has been reviewing theater for the *New York Daily News*. . . . JOSEPH EPSTEIN's most recent book is a collection of essays on literary subjects, *Pertinent Players*. . . . DAVID DOOLEY's *The Revenge by Love*, to be published by Story Line Press, will include two of the three poems in this issue. . . . DAVID MASON is completing a second book of poems, called *Provider*. . . . MICHAEL McFEE's most recent books of poems are *Sad Girl Sitting on a Running Board* (Gnomon Press, 1991) and *To See* (North Carolina Wesleyan College Press, 1991). . . . MARK JARMAN's next collection of poetry, *Questions for Ecclesiastes*, is forthcoming from David R. Godine.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

It may have been the next day that we came to a wooded strip of land with water on each side. We were walking in the usual files with a squad strung out in front when guns began firing at us. I knew the sound very well. The German machine gun fired faster than ours, and their submachine gun, the Schmeisser, positively purred. I dropped face down. Six inches above my head a wicked, white gash appeared in a tree trunk. . . .

—Louis Simpson, "In Transit," p. 619.

In our time we have become used to art that is scaled to our prosaic expectations; the distance between us and a poet of Milton's loftiness can seem very great indeed. Milton challenges our notions of what is genuine or real in art. Despite his prescient arguments about divorce, censorship and government, his severe religious convictions seem, at a glance, far from the realities of our troubled *fin de siècle*. We forget that his era of civil war, regicide, long and short parliaments, Muggletonians and Chiliasts, was every bit as divisive as ours.

—David Mason, "Milton's Fame in Heaven," p. 669.

There are over 300 Shakespeare festivals in the United States, most of which are terrible. Americans' love of the Bard is like Olivia's infatuation with Cesario in *Twelfth Night*: "I would you were as I would have you be." Stoutly believing that Shakespeare has eternal value, we nonetheless alter his dress, speech, politics, and entire philosophical outlook to make him "relevant" to today. Shakespeare must never change *us*, nor even challenge us, but must tell us what we already know—that fascism is bad, that racism is worse, that women are oppressed. Shakespeare is not only our contemporary, but politically correct as well.

—Richard Hornby, "Shakespeare in Oregon," p. 697.

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